The Development of Iraqi Shi'a Mourning Rituals in Modern Iraq:

The *'Ashurā* Rituals and Visitation of *Al-Arb'ain*

by

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A Thesis Presented In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

Approved November 2012 by the
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ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY

December 2012

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ABSTRACT

This thesis argues that the mourning rituals of *'Ashurā* and the Forty Day Visitation *Zyarat Al-Arb'ain* contribute to the social or individual life of Iraqi Shi'a. They also make significant contributions through creating a symbolic language to communicate for the community, as well as communicating with their essential symbolic structure. Second, the Forty Day Visitation *Zyarat Al-Arb'ain* is one of the most significant collective mourning rituals, one that expresses unity and solidarity of the Iraqi Shi'a community, and helps them to represent their collective power, and maintain their collective existence.

This study uses two of Victor Turner's tripartite models. For *'Ashurā* the rite of passage rituals is used, which consists of the separation, margin, and re-aggregation phase. Through this process of entering and leaving time and social structure, it helps in changing the social status of the participants. The other model used for *Al-Arb'ain* is pilgrimage as a social process, which includes three levels of communitas: existential, normative, and ideological communitas.

The Shi'a in Iraq are holding a position similar to Turner's notion of communitas since they are living within a society that is Muslim and yet even though they are a larger population of the society, they still become marginalized by the Sunni population socially, economically, and politically. Social relations and links play a significant role for Shi'a in *'Ashurā* and *Al-Arb'ain* as a reflection between their social status as an undefined communitas and the general structure of Iraqi society.

DEDICATION

In remembrance of my father, Hattab Hamdan, 1924-1999

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many people have provided unforgettable support throughout the different stages of writing this Master's Thesis that would never have been possible without the help of my professors, friends and family. I offer my deepest gratitude, sincerest thanks, and appreciation to my mentors, the co-chairs of this Thesis: Dr. Shahla Talebi and Dr. Souad T. Ali for the invaluable effort they exerted in directing my research, their patience throughout the time of completing my work, and their important guidance that eventually helped me center my own ideas.

My sincere appreciation also goes to Dr. Joel Gereboff for his support and guidance especially with regard to theoretical notions and thoughts. My sincere appreciation equally goes to Dr. Abdullahi Gallab for his support, assistance and invaluable advice. I would like to also extend my thanks to all of my professors and instructors in the Religious Studies Department at Arizona State University for their support.

Special thanks go to all those who helped me during my field study in Iraq. Particularly, I would like to thank journalists Emad Jasim and Basim Jihad whose support was vital to completing this study. Thanks also to journalist Haider Al-Salamy who provided me with important information and references. My thanks further go to all the colleagues in the Media Section in Husseinite shrine and Abbasid shrine, especially Sayid Hashim Al- Mosawey in the 'Department of Husseinite *Mawakib* and Committees in Iraq and Islamic World' for providing me with information that greatly enriched this research.

I would like to express my gratitude and respect for the religious authorities Ayatollah Sayid Mohammed Taqi Al- Mudarrisy and his head office Sayid Hussein Al- Radawy, and Ayatollah Sayid Mohammed Baqir Al- Airawany for their time of interviews and answers to my many questions. I would like also to thank the office of Ayatollah Al- Shirazi in Karbala, office of Grand Ayatollah Al- Hakim in Najaf, especially Sayid Ala' Al- Hakim and Sayid Muhanad Mahboba for their support. My thanks also go to Sheikh Mohammed Sad Al-Makhzoomy for their cooperation and warm reception.

My deep gratitude goes to my colleague Jalal Hasan who generously read the draft of this Thesis and provided valuable remarks and feedback during our conversations through the many stages of this study.

I would like to offer my gratitude to all those who helped me complete this research; I cannot convey my gratitude in words. Mohsen Beni Saeed, to begin with, Dr. Ibrahim Al- Haydari, researcher Ala' Hameed, Dr.Nadia Faydh, Diana Coleman, Jafr Martin, Mohammed Qasim, Ala' Fadhil, Dr. Naseer Ghadeer, researcher Mohammed Qasim Abbas, Sheikh Basim, Ahmed Hattab, Ahmed Noori, Muna Noori, and all the Iraqi people that assisted me and for any reason my memory could not remember their names.

Finally, my gratitude and love are reserved to my wife Ahlam and my daughter Rose for their effort in reading the research. My deep gratitude goes to my family whose patience and support were essential to overcome all the hardships and smoothening the difficult path of researching.

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PREFACE

This research is the first of its type on Iraqi Shi'a at the moment in 2012. It was difficult for researchers to take on similar achievement in Iraq for many reasons such as the shortage of references, and the huge risks they could face. Saddam's regime practiced violent suppression of individual freedoms and banned Iraqi religious gatherings from practicing their rituals freely. He was keen to ban any kind of study no matter the content that could break the wall of isolation he imposed on Iraqi ethnoreligous groups such as the Shi'a. Saddam's regime used to think that the Iraqi Shi'a were enemies and posed a real threat to the regime. That is why he was in a state of conflict with the Shi'a since assuming power in 1968 until his fall in 2003. Amongst the tools of conflict were marginalization of Iraqi Shi'a internally, and banning any kind of studies related to them. Hence, my study of the biggest and most important mourning rituals practiced by Iraqi Shi'a on *'Ashurā* and *Al-Arb'ain* is the first study that deals with this subject.

To study this subject well, I needed to visit Iraq and conduct an independent field study on these rituals in their own setting, and also to study every related phenomenon. Apart from the financial hardships I faced in conducting this study and the lack of financial support, the real difficulty was in the perils any researcher could face in Iraq, in the absence of security and ceaseless violence acts. The places for practicing the mourning rituals, attended by huge numbers of people, were utter targets of expected violent acts by terrorists and the remnants of the Baath party. Many places witnessed gory explosions that targeted the participants and those close by, and hundreds were

killed. The two co-chairs of my research continued to contact me during my stay to be sure of my safety during my research in Iraq. Professor Shahla Talebi used to send many emails to check on my safety every time she heard news of explosions targeting the participants of the rituals and their processions in Baghdad and other cities. I, by chance, survived one of those explosions; after leaving a place in Baghdad a huge explosion occurred a few minutes after my departure.

I could say conducting such type of research in Iraq is not an easy matter. If studying such a subject during Saddam's time would run the risk of trial for espionage and possible execution, conducting it after Saddam's time could endanger a researcher's life (more details about this in the first chapter).

Finally, I would like to mention that all Arabic translations in this Thesis have been translated by me, unless otherwise stated.

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

A. Statement of Purpose

The mourning rituals of the days of *'Ashurā*[1] and *Al-Arb'ain*[2] for the martyrdom of Imam Al-Hussein, his nineteen family members, and seventy-two followers in Karbala 680 C.E. (61 A. H.)[3] are considered two of the most unique events for Iraqi Shi'a today. The location of the shrine of the martyr Al-Hussein in Karbala, Iraq, played a major role in the development of these rituals. The city evolved in significance as the center for these rituals, the sacred place in which the annual commemoration of the martyrdom happens and is re-enacted to keep the memory of the event alive in the minds of its pilgrims. Pilgrims arrive by the millions every year to take part in these collective rituals to express their loyalty and mourning over the tragedy that happened in 680 C.E.

Commemorating *'Ashurā* and *Al-Arb'ain*, which started in the 7th century, has influenced the life of Iraqi Shi'a through their collective participation in the rituals which recreates their collective identity as one community. The course of these rituals of mourning the martyrdom are represented in several activities like crying, striking the chest *(latm),* back flagellation or lashing (*zangeel)*, head laceration (*tatbir)*, and all other kinds of activities that can inflict pain to the body, and serve

[1] *'Ashurā* is the tenth day of *Muharram* in the Islamic calendar, which is the day on which Imam Al-Hussein was killed on the 10th of *Muharram* 61 A.H (680 C.E.).
[2] Arabic for the 'Forty Day Visitation' concept (*Zyarat Al-Arb'ain*).
[3] A.H. means After Hijra of Prophet Mohammed from Mecca to Medina. This is used in the Islamic calendar, which consists of twelve lunar months, with about 354 days. The first month is *Muharram*, and the twelfth month is *Thu Al-Hujja.* There's about an eleven day difference between the Islamic calendar and the Gregorian calendar, every year. *Muharram* 1st, 1 A.H. is equal to July 16th, 622 C.E.

as the reenactment of the battle and the anniversary of Imam Al-Hussein's martyrdom. This is in addition to the pilgrimage to Al-Hussein's shrine 40 days after the anniversary of his martyrdom; people from everywhere in Iraq travel on foot to journey toward the shrine in Karbala, practicing on the road the usual rituals and activities like reciting enthusiastic poems and reenacting the battle. As is the case with most of the socially-connected rituals, the rituals of the mourning of *'Ashurā* helps the Shi'a from all parts of Iraq to reconnect with each other as one community united together in the face of all the challenges that they have to meet in their daily lives. Since 2003, in conjunction with the fall of the Baath regime which had previously limited the practicing of the rituals of *'Ashurā* and *Al-Arb'ain* in Iraq, the numbers have increased each year. These events gain more popularity annually as the increasing number of participants demonstrate (in 2012 more than 17.5 million Iraqi Shi'a from the approximate 31 million total population took part in the mourning of *Al-Arb'ain*).

This study will address two essential points related to the mourning rituals of *'Ashurā* and the Forty Day Visitation *Zyarat Al-Arb'ain*. First, apart from their religious purpose (being performed as religious rituals), the mourning rituals of *'Ashurā* and *Al-Arb'ain* contribute to the social and individual life of Iraqi Shi'a. They also make significant contributions through creating a symbolic language to communicate for the community, as well as communicating with their essential symbolic structure (Prophet Mohammed and his family). Second, the Forty Day Visitation *Zyarat Al-Arb'ain* is one of the most significant collective mourning rituals, one that expresses unity and solidarity of the Iraqi Shi'a community, and

helps them to represent their collective power, and maintain their collective existence.

B. Significance of Study

The importance of this study stems from the fact that it explores an important part of the Iraqi Shi'a community through studying the continuous development of a mourning ritual that is gaining in participation, for the mourning of *'Ashurā* and *Al-Arb'ain.*

Beyond a religious obligation and experience, Iraqi Shi'a observe these mourning rituals as a way of restructuring their lives and the life of their community in a way that generates improvement, by adopting the religious experience and transforming it into a socio-cultural frame. These rituals, being an expression of the Shi'a religious experience- which is the essence of the Shi'a faith- bear much significance important for understanding the Shi'a faith in general and the Iraqi Shi'a faith specifically. This study will foster understanding by following the changes and cycles these rituals have been through, especially after the Baath regime fell in 2003, and the role they have played in these various changes, in addition to the role of these rituals in Iraq today.

Another important contribution of this research is that it is the first English academic study focused on contemporary Iraqi Shi'a mourning rituals, especially rituals for *Al-Arb'ain*. The rituals and practices of *'Ashurā* and *Al-Arb'ain* have been ignored academically especially in the last four decades. Since the first contributions of the Iraqi sociologist Ali Al-Wardi (1913-1995), to study the Iraqi society in which he made some references to these rituals, only a few subsequent

studies have ever tackled these two events and their practices by Iraqi Shi'a. These include the anthropologist Robert Fernea's *Shaykh and Effendi* (1957), an anthropological study of one of the Iraqi tribes in southern Iraq; Elizabeth Warnock Fernea's *Guests of the Sheik*, another anthropological study of an Iraqi village done at the end of the 1950s, Yitzhak Nakash's *The Shiis of Iraq*, which studied Shi'a in Iraq up to 1958. In addition to these studies, the two Iraqi contributions of the ethnographer Ibrahim Al-Haydari's (1913-) *The Tragedy of Karbala,* an anthropological study of the mourning of Imam Al-Hussein as a field study in 1968 (in Arabic) and the sociologist Faleh A. Jabar's (1946-) discussion of these rituals in his book *The Shi'ite Movement in Iraq*, in which the author explores the Shi'a mourning rituals regardless of the historical period, but obviously the rituals studied belonged to the 1970s and before that time. In spite of all these studies and references to the Iraqi Shi'a community's rituals, there is no recent study about the Shi'a community in Iraq and the changes that happened throughout the last forty years, while facing the challenge of the prohibition of rituals from the Baath regime. After the fall of the Baath regime in 2003, practices arose from the Iraqi Shi'a, which are important to study.

Another important feature of this study is that it departs from all the previous scholarly works for it no longer takes the Iranian Shi'a rituals as its points of references. Most academic studies on Shi'a have used the Iranian Shi'a model as their main background and taken it as a representation of the Shi'a internationally. Though significant and rich in the material presented, the Iranian model cannot be the sole representation of the Shi'a community around the world; to depict the

complexity, local studies for each community are required. The individual differences can affect the structure and development of the community itself; and thus, the Iranian individual is different in his frame of mind from his or her Arab peer, and such difference finds an expression in the structure of their respective communities. Such differences, in order to be noticed, need to be studied separately. Moreover, Iraq is still playing a significant role in the development of the Shi'a communities around the world, as it contains within its territories the shrines of many Shi'a Imams: Imam Ali in Najaf, Imam Al-Hussein and his brother Al-Abbas in Karbala, the site of their martyrdom, Al-Kadhumya shrines in Baghdad and the shrines of the last Shi'a Imams in Samarra. This is in addition to one of the most significant schools of Shi'a *howzah* teachings in Najaf. All this adds to the importance of studying the Shi'a community in Iraq outside the Iranian model, as Iraq contains the largest Arab Shi'a community.

C. The Position of Al-Hussein in Islam

Al-Hussein bin[4] Ali bin Abi Talib (4- 61 AH, 626- 680 C.E.) was the Prophet's grandson and son to Ali bin Abi Talib, the fourth Righteous Caliph of Sunni Islam, and the first Imam of Shi'a. His mother was Fatima, daughter of Prophet Mohammed and mother to Al-Hassan, Zainab, and Um Kulthum.

Al-Hussein grew up in Ali's house, which was close to Prophet Mohammed's who held him so importantly. Mohammed considered Ali's family as his own and its members as his family.[5] It is known that Mohammed was highly attached to Ali and Fatima's sons; Al-Hassan and Al-Hussein, and he loved them so much

[4] "bin or ibn" means "son of."
[5] Mohammed bin Saad , *Kitab Al- Tabaqat Al- Kabeer,* Ed. Ali Mohammed Umar, Vol. 6, (Cairo: Maktabat Al- Khangee, 2001) 402.

and used to play with them in his home or the mosque in the presence of Muslims. When asked why he was attached to them, the Prophet said, "They are my son and my daughter's sons." [6] Also, another *hadith* mentioned that Mohammed held Al-Hassan and Al-Hussein's hands and said that he who loved me and these two and Ali, their father, would be at the same level with me in heaven.[7]

At every occasion, Mohammed expressed the prominence of Al-Hassan and Al-Hussein and his love for them and their closeness to him. Many *hadiths* narrated by Mohammed on Al-Hassan and Al-Hussein confirmed that they were some of the important people who he loved in the world. A reason for his love for them was that he was their grandfather, and they were more like his own children especially after he lost his three male sons (Al Qasim, Abdulla, and Ibrahim) when they were children. It was clear to Muslims that Mohammed was treating them as members of his own family and that Muslims should treat them likewise and show them feelings of love and respect. He tried to explain to all Muslims to love Al-Hassan and Al-Hussein the same as himself, and he mentioned that "These are my two sons. He who loves them loves me."[8] To strengthen his care for them, Mohammed warned Muslims from hurting or assaulting them. So that he said, "He who loves Hassan and Hussein loves me, and he who hates them hates me."[9] That's why the majority of Muslims respect and love the Prophet's

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[6] Bin Saad 6:403.
[7] Sibt Yusuf bin Farghli Ibn Al- Jowzey, *Tathqiret Al- Khawass,* (Tehran: Maktabat Nenawa Al-Haditha, n.d.) 233-34.
[8] Abdul Rahman Ibn Al- Jowzey, *Sifat Al- Safwa,* Ed. Mahmood Fakhury, Vol. 1, 3rd ed., (Beirut: Dar Al- Ma'rifa, 1985) 762.
[9] Bin Saad 6:404.

grandchildren for their closeness to him and for respecting the Prophet's will and for their likable traits for Muslims.

Al-Hussein was known as a humble person in spite of the prominent status he occupied amongst Muslims. He used to sit with the poor, treat them nicely, share their simple food and invite them to eat in his house.[10] He gained the love and respect of almost all Muslims, especially the poor of them.

According to the myth building story, some people refer to *hadiths* that are related to the Prophet Mohammed about his knowing of the death of Imam Al-Hussein before the actual event. These *hadiths* mention that the Prophet Mohammed was aware of his grandson's destiny. One of these *hadiths* related to the Prophet Mohammed tells us that the Prophet was asleep and awakened, frightened, and tearful. When asked why, he said that he saw Al-Hussein getting killed in Iraq and "Gebrail"[11] had brought some soil from Karbala where Al-Hussein would be killed.[12] Al-Hussein's personality acquires respect from both Sunni and Shi'a. The reason is that Al-Hussein is one of the most prominent symbols related to Mohammed, spiritually and biologically. In addition, after his death, Al-Hussein was a symbol of heroism, defiance of oppression, and sacrifice.

Muslims continued loving Al-Hussein after Prophet Mohammed's death. Al-Hussein was revered to the Righteous Caliphs for his kinship with the Prophet and for Al-Hussein's respected personality. For example, Omar ibn Al-Khattab, the second Righteous Caliph, was known for his love and respect for Al-Hussein and

[10] Bin Saad 6:413.
[11] In Islam, Gebrail is one of the higher ranking angels, who was the messenger between Allah and the Prophets.
[12] Bin Saad 6:413-14.

he used to visit him if Al-Hussein had not visited him for a period of time.[13] Even Muawiyah bin Abi Sufyan (602- 680 C.E.), the founder of the Umayyad Dynasty and the first Umayyad Caliph, who was an enemy to Al-Hussein's family, answered Al-Hussein's greeting by saying "welcome to the son of the messenger of Allah."[14] Some stories try to make Muawiyah appear as not having a role in Al-Hussein's death, making him a scapegoat, but to blame his son Yazid. One story narrates that Muawiyah told his son, Yazid, before his death that he prepared Caliphate for him and subdued all Arabs to him but he feared some who might challenge his rule and Al-Hussein came at the forefront of them, because Al-Hussein had refused to recognize Yazid as a Caliph during the life of Muawiyah.[15] Muawiyah knew that the Iraqis would insist on asking Al-Hussein to challenge Yazid. So Muawiyah asked Yazid that if Al-Hussein did, forgive him for his kinship to the Prophet and for his position among the Muslims.[16] Instead Yazid did not follow his father's advice and he was not concerned with Al-Hussein's position among the Muslims. He sent an army to Karbala to enforce Al-Hussein to recognize Yazid as the Caliph, or he would be killed. I will discuss the battle of Karbala later on in the Historical Background chapter.

I am not trying to give a complete historical account of Al-Hussein here when this research is focused on rituals. Rather, I am providing a background on Al-Hussein's prominence as an Islamic symbol whose roots are attached to the

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[13] Bin Saad 6:409.
[14] Bin Saad 6:409.
[15] Ali bin Mohammed Ibn Al-Atheer, *Asad Al-Ghaba fi Maarifet Al- Sahaba,* Eds. Ali Mohammed Muaawad and Adil Ahmed Abdulmawjood, Vol.2, (Beirut: Dar Alkutub Al'almiya, n.d.) 27.
[16] S. Ibn Al- Jowzey 235.

Prophet and Islamic structure. The relation between the Prophet and Al-Hussein on one hand, and the Prophet and Ali from the other assisted in the manifestation of Al-Hussein's personality to play a major role in Islam after the Prophet and Ali's deaths. Events, conflicts and sociopolitical changes helped in having Al-Hussein as a pivot in them. Al-Hussein's personality was prepared to play the role of heroism in events yet to come. He is a representation of the figure of a hero whom other see capable of rescuing them from persecution and bring justice to them. Although Al-Hussein was martyred in Karbala and his family fell captive, his image as a hero and symbol of the Prince of Martyrs (*Sayid Al-Shuhada*) remains present among Shi'a. Mourning rituals practiced in his memory every year have become solid in their sentiment to represent the events, thoughts and stands to an extent that they have become a part of their social, mental, psychological and political structure.

D. Research Limitations

One of the obstacles confronted in carrying out this research is a dearth of sources which can provide satisfactory information for this study. Undertaking such research topics was risky during the Baath regime, which forced scholars to refrain from tackling such subjects. This led to the scarcity of writings about the Shi'a. In addition to this, the Iraqi government prohibited the practice of '*Ashurā* and *Al-Arb'ain* rituals since the beginning of 1981, and no public rituals took place until 2003. All these factors caused a difficulty in approaching these subjects and a lack of availability of enough sources, necessitating a field study of these rituals and their setting and thus most of the conclusions are dependent on

data gained or collected from studying the rituals as they are presently practiced in Iraq.

Furthermore, since 2003 when these rituals were revived on a wide scale, the participants have always been at risk and prone to continuous attack. Because of the unstable security of Iraq, any gatherings of any kind are at risk of attacks by terrorists, especially if these gatherings are related to the practicing of religious rituals, like that of '*Ashura* and *Al-Arb'ain*. Attending the activities that mark these two occasions, which are usually very crowded events, put the lives of the participants in great danger. When the participants are in large groups, they become an easy and attractive target for attack by former Baath regime members, since their secular ideology is against Shi'a, Al-Qaeda members, as they have a *Wahhabi* ideology that is also against Shi'a, and other members for political and ideological reasons. Even without the threat of attacks, it is not an easy feat to walk for days (depending on the starting point, and the distance from Karbala) to reach Karbala. For example, the distance I walked from Najaf to Karbala during *Al-Arb'ain* was about 83 kilometers that was separated into three and a half days, as the roads have suffered damage from many bombings, along with thousands of casualties, adding to the exhaustion the participants endured because of the physical efforts they have to exert in their pilgrimage.

E. Scope of Study

The study addresses the mourning rituals of *'Ashurā* and *Al-Arb'ain* which the Twelver Shi'a practiced in Iraq between 1968- 2012 for the following reasons:

First, the period tackled in the study is considered one of the most important periods in the history of mourning rituals of Shi'a in Iraq because of all the wars that Iraq has undergone, leading to a large number of Shi'a victims. Because of the tragedies of wars, the rituals witnessed acceleration in their practices as the Shi'a now had religious as well as social and individual motivations and aptitude to indulge in practicing these rituals in *'Ashurā* and the *Al-Arb'ain*. The Shi'a community in Iraq attempts to express grief over their social tragedies using as an outlet the more general grief over the tragedy of their early Imam and his followers in Karbala. Such an attempt lightens the stress of their harsh reality and pushes the pressure toward a more collective and historical event in which all the Shi'a participate. Such a historical perspective for practicing the mourning rituals provides a chance for ultimate salvation through the collective participation in events to show the religious commitment and devotion of the participants, which they believe will ensure eternal reward.

Second, the period under study is the period that witnessed the rise of the Baath party, which prohibited these rituals, and its fall, after which the rituals revived on a large scale as a reaction to the previous prohibition as well as a way of resisting any attempt to marginalize the role of Shi'a in contemporary Iraq. These rituals contributed largely to enhancing the common identity and increased the solidarity of the Shi'a against the hegemony and dominance of the Baath state. The Baath regime came into power in 1968 with a secular orientation, which then gradually changed to become a more religious Sunni background. During the time of the invasion of Kuwait in 1990, the addition of God is Great (*Allahu Akbar*)

was made to the Iraqi flag, and the state used the Islamic religion as a source of power against the international military.[17] Also, in 1995, Saddam Hussein used Islamic religious symbols to improve his image, by preventing the sale of alcohol and compelling Islamic punishments against thieves.[18] The Shi'a considered the prohibition of practicing their rituals as an attempt by the Sunni authority to ignore and marginalize them from the Iraqi scene. Thus, after 2003 most of the Shi'a set about to practice the mourning rituals to assert their common identity on the one hand, and their central role within the Iraqi society on the other, after many decades of prohibition by the regime. Hence, it becomes important to study the significance of these rituals from 2003 to 2012, which demonstrates different ways that Iraqi Shi'a constitute a major force in the country, one unified community that has its common goals and common response to the challenges faced by their country.

Third, the period covered by the research lacked enough sufficient studies of the Shi'a mourning rituals in Iraq, as noted earlier. For long decades, Iraq lived in some kind of isolation from the world because of the confusing policies of its ruling regime, which waged different wars and received many international penalties in addition to the domestic troubles Iraq suffered during that period. This affected on a large scale the production of local studies, academic or otherwise, about the period in question, because of the risks involved. The situation did not witness a great change after 2003 as the Iraqis were still facing great dangers in practicing and researching the mourning rituals. With this

[17] Eric Davis, *Memories of State: Politics, History, and Collective Identity in Modern Iraq*, (London: University of California Press, 2005) 182.
[18] Davis 232.

consideration in mind, it becomes necessary now to tackle the subject and explore the main factors that contributed in developing the practice of these rituals.

F. Terminologies

1. Mourning Rituals

The mourning rituals referred to in this research are practiced after losing someone close or dear to the individual; in this research the individuals who are practicing the rituals are the members of the Shi'a community. These rituals include crying, chest beating, celebrating the anniversary and also celebrating the achievements and traits of the departed in different occasions. For the Shi'a community, the mourning rituals practiced by the Shi'a in the memorial of Imam Al-Hussein's martyrdom in *'Ashurā* and *Al-Arb'ain* are considered the most important for the Shi'a community in general.

2. Rituals of *'Ashurā*

These are the group of rituals practiced by the Shi'a community to mourn the anniversary of Imam Al-Hussein's martyrdom with seventy-two of his family members and followers in the battle of Karbala in 680 C.E. *'Ashurā* means "the tenth day" which is the day on which Al-Hussein was killed on the 10th of *Muharram* 61 A.H. according to the Islamic calendar. The rituals of '*Ashurā* usually start on the first day of *Muharram* and culminate on the tenth day of '*Ashurā,* which is a formal holiday to celebrate the occasion. Among the most significant practices of mourning throughout the 10 days (in some cases 13 days), are *Majilis Al-'Aza* (mourning councils) in which people read elegies for the martyrs and remember the different events in Karbala, chest beating (*latm)* is

done by all participants, back chain-lashing (*zangeel)*, reading in the tenth day *Maqtal Al-Hussein* (which is the story of the battle in detail), the *'Ashurā* visitation (which is a pilgrimage to the shrine of Al-Hussein in Karbala), processions of head laceration (*Mawakib Al- Tatbir)* which is striking oneself with a sword or dagger on the tenth day, and performing passion plays (*tashabih)* that re-enact the battle; this is in addition to distributing food and drinks for the participants from the first day of *Muharram* to the 10th day (*'Ashurā*).

3. Rituals of *Al-Arb'ain*

These are the rituals practiced on the anniversary of the 40th day after the martyrdom of Imam Al-Hussein, which is usually the 20th of *Safar*, the second month in the Islamic calendar. The practices include on-foot pilgrimage to the Imam Al-Hussein's shrine: a large number of people set on a journey from the different cities and villages of Iraq toward Karbala, 100 kilometers south of Baghdad. The pilgrimage is called the Visitation of the Forty Days (*Ziyarat Al-Arb'ain)*, which occurs 40 days after the day of *'Ashurā.* In addition to this journey, there are other rituals usually practiced in this event like the re-enactment of the caravan *(Mawakib Al-Dhaan)* that brought the remaining members of Al-Hussein's family back to Karbala after 40 days (which I will explain later on in the Historical Background section) of the battle accompanied by processions of *latm* and *tatbir*. One of the most significant features of these rituals is the sense of social solidarity that emerges during the event as Iraqis provide necessities for the millions of pilgrims during their journey.

4. Mourning Council (*Majilis Al-'Aza)*

Majlis is the singular form of *majalis*, which is a memorial service in which the attendants pay tribute to the martyrdom of their Imam through reciting a sermon and rhythmic lamentation poetry *niyahah* done by a religious man called *qari, khateeb,* or *sheikh*. This mourning council is called *quraya* in Iraq, which means reading. These *majalis* are usually held on a large scale in private houses, mosques or other public places during the first ten days of *Muharram*. Usually they end up with the *latmiya* ritual led by a *radood* (bard who recites the story of martyrdom) reading elegies with rhythms that accompany and modulate the beating of the chest. *Majlis* often depends on three major factors: the sponsor of the *majlis*, the preacher or speaker who leads the participants, and the attendants who participate in the ritual. The popularity of this gathering, reflected by the number of attendants, signifies the success of the sponsor as well as the popularity and importance of the preacher or the reader. Most of these gatherings are held according to an established timetable announced by the sponsor of *majlis*.

5. Processions of Al-Hussein (*Al-Mawakib Al-Husseiniyya*)

The processions of Al-Hussein (*Al-Mawakib Al-Husseiniyya*) are a group of people participating together in doing the rituals of mourning mentioned above. Usually these processions are known as mourning processions (*Mawakib Al-'Aza*). The people who provide food, drinks and other provisions for the mourners are referred to as processions of service (*Mawakib Al-Khidmah*). Usually, every geographical district or tribe organizes a procession, whether for mourning or serving the mourners, holding a banner referring to its sponsors.

6. Visitation (*Ziyara*)

This is the pilgrimage to the sacred Shi'a shrines during private and public occasions to renew vows of commitment and devotion to their Imams. This visitation (*ziyara*) is usually one of the features of piety for any Shi'a Muslim, as a response to what is continued in most of the Shi'a books. These visitations are also considered means of gaining intercession provided by the visited Imam, as he is considered one of the personalities that won the approval of Allah, and He can help to bridge the spiritual gap between person and His creator, in addition to providing penance for the visitors, and giving them the chance to pray for whatever they wish for in this life or the life after.

The visitation (*ziyara*) is quite different in meaning from that of *Hajj*. The former is used to refer to the visits Shi'a Muslims undertake of their Imams' shrines at any time of the year, while *Hajj* (the fifth pillar of Islam) means going to Mecca at a particular time of the year which is the month of *Thu Al-Hujja* to participate in the *Hajj* rituals. Many Western studies conflate the two rituals considering them the same and using the term 'pilgrimage' to refer to each of them. This is basically not the case in Islamic studies, which suggests differentiating between the two terms as each involves different rituals with distinct meanings (I will discuss this further in the fifth chapter).

Many Shi'a make several visits annually to the shrine of Imam Al-Hussein. Some of these visitations are ordinary ones; they can be done any time of the year.

Others are done for particular occasions.[19] Among all these occasions, *'Ashurā* and *Al-Arb'ain* are the most significant for the Shi'a and usually receive wide participation.

7. Visitation of *'Ashurā* (*Ziyarat 'Ashurā*)

Every year on the tenth of *Muharram*, the Iraqi Shi'a set off on *Ziyarat 'Ashurā* for the visitation of Al-Hussein's shrine in Karbala as this is the most significant ritual practiced to celebrate the anniversary of this day. Shi'a sources of *hadith* assert the importance of '*Ashurā* visitation. There are a number of *hadiths* in Shi'a references recommending Muslims to visit the shrine of Imam Al-Hussein. One of these *hadiths* says: "Whoever visited the shrine of Al-Hussein (peace be upon him) and stayed over, he would be like one of his martyrs."[20]

Many of the significant pioneers of Shi'a scholars, like Sheikhs Al-Kulayni (864-941C.E.) and Al-Tusi (995-1067 C.E.) devoted chapters of their books explaining the importance and method of practicing the visitation; Sheikh Jaafar bin Quluweh Al- Qomi (died 978 C.E. - 368 A.H.) assigned a whole chapter in his book *Kamil Al-Ziyarat* (All the Visitations) to explain the importance and methodology of visiting the shrine of Al-Hussein, especially on the day of '*Ashurā.*

Thus, the importance of the visitation of '*Ashurā* is illustrated and encouraged from all the references made in the Shi'a sources, most of which note the reward gained from this visitation. Moreover, these Shi'a books also suggest other ways

[19] Such as visiting Imam Al-Hussein's shrine in the middle of *Rajab*, the middle of *Sh'aban*, *Laylat Al-Qadr*, in both *Eids*, *Arafat*, *'Ashurā*, and *Al-Arb'ain*.
[20] Jaafar bin Quluweh Al- Qomi, *Kamil Alziyarat,* (Beirut: Muassasat Al Fikr Al-Islami, 2012) 216.

to practice the visitation ritual, in case one is unable to reach the shrine (because of the distance or risks involved), like practicing other rituals from the roof of the house, or any high location.[21] This is an important point because it allows Shi'a (no matter their location or circumstances) practice the rituals in secret in case of limitations or prohibitions of the governments, or if the distance was unreachable for the Shi'a.

The rituals of *'Ashurā* visitation (*Ziyarat 'Ashurā*) in Karbala includes the following: standing in front of the tomb, reciting formal Islamic greetings, as all Muslims think that martyrs are in fact alive in God's kingdom: "Do not think of those who are slain in God's way as dead, Nay, they live, finding their sustenance in the Presence of their Lord." [22] Thus the visitor speaks to his Imam as if he is alive listening to his visitors.

The visitor follows other rituals called "*Adab Al-Ziyara*" (The Customs of Visitation). Among these, the visitor has to be clean in body and clothes, to show respect and humbleness; before the visitors come into the shrine, they must ask permission from Allah, the Prophet, and the Imam they are visiting to enter the gates, then after entering they stand as close as possible to the tomb. After that, the visitors pray, read Quran, pray for repentance and any specific prayer, and ask forgiveness for guilt or sin.[23] In getting permission to enter the shrine, the visitor reads a special request written on a big board hung high next to the gates of the tomb. After reading the written request, the visitor comes close to the windows

[21] Al- Qomi 217-18.
[22] The Holy Quran, Trans. Abdullah Yusef Ali, (New York: Tahrike, 2009) 3:169-70.
[23] Abbas Mohammed Rida Al- Qomi, *Mafateeh Al- Jinan,* (Beirut: Al-'Almi Li Al- Matbo'at, 1998) 375-80.

surrounding the tomb to recite invocation (*Du'a*) from specific books to ask for blessings and support; usually this entices an emotional response so that the visitor cries during invocation. Then visitors do the "*Ziyara* Prayer" (which is practiced only in visitations), and read *Ziyarat 'Ashurā* (a special invocation for the day of *'Ashurā*) that is written on the walls near the tomb.

8. Visitation of *Al-Arb'ain* (*Zyarat Al-Arb'ain*)

This is second important visitation, after *'Ashurā*, for Shi'a in Iraq. Usually the rituals include going on foot to visit the shrine of Imam Al-Hussein on the 20th of *Safar* to celebrate the passing of 40 days for the martyrdom. This visitation is called restoring the head (*Maradd Al- Ras*), as it is believed by Shi'a that on this particular day, the head of Al-Hussein, which was carried on a spear with other heads to be shown to the Caliph in Damascus, was returned to its body when the caravan of prisoners came back from Damascus to Karbala. On that day, the head was buried with the body at the site of the battle of Karbala.

The rituals of *Al-Arb'ain* are connected with the return of Al-Hussein's family from Damascus passing through Karbala as asserted by Sayid Ibn Tawoos (1193-1265 C.E.):

> "When Hussein's women and children returned from Sham [Damascus] and reached Iraq, they asked their guide to take them to Karbala. When they reached the spot where their Imam was killed, they found there Jabir bin Abdullah Al-Ansari and other Hashemites had come to the place to visit the tomb of Al-Hussein (peace be upon him). They all gathered to mourn the martyrdom of

their Imam with crying and *latm*, and started to hold funerals, attracting other people who came to them dressing in black which lasted for few days."[24]

Historically speaking, this signifies the beginning of mourning rituals for Al-Hussein's martyrdom, after 40 days of the event, with crying and striking the face and wearing black as the major features of these rituals.

One of the most important references to *Al-Arb'ain* visitation was the one mentioned in *Tahtheeb Alahkam* by Al- Tusi (dated from one of the four books of *hadith* for Shi'a), asserting the significance of this visitation as one of the signs of a believer (*Muamin*): "It is told about Hassan Al-Askari (the 11th Shi'a Imam) that he said *Mu'min* has five signs: praying, the visitation of *Al-Arb'ain*, wearing the ring in the right hand, increasing prostration, and pronouncing loudly in the name of God".[25] Although the visitation of *Al-Arb'ain* comes second in its religious importance after *'Ashurā,* which comes first, the visitation of *Al-Arb'ain* has drawn more public attendance during the last nine years; the number of people attending this visitation exceeds that of *'Ashurā.*

Visiting the tombs of the dead and celebrating *Al-Arb'ain* (40 days after death), is a common practice in the Shi'a community in Iraq. The mourning council happens at the third, seventh, and 40th days, as well as the annual anniversary after the death. There are no valid studies about the significance of these days in particular, but it is apparent that there is emphasis on the 40th day.

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[24] Ali bin Musa Ibn Tawoos, *Almalhoof Ala Katla Al-Tofoof*, (Tehran: Dar Aloswa, 1992) 225.
[25] Mohammed bin Al- Hassan Al-Tusi, *Tahtheeb Alahkam*, Ed. Mohammed Jaafar Shamsaldeen, Vol. 6, (Beirut: Dar Al-Ta'rof, 1992) 43.

The use of numbers in the event of death is not restricted to a certain society or religion, but is something that can be generalized to all societies and religions; the number 40 remains of great importance in most of the societies in the Near East.

During the Baath regime, the visitation of *Al-Arb'ain* in Iraq usually resulted in clashes between participants and the Baath regime. Thus, it explains the prohibition and why it was forbidden along with other rituals. At the beginning of the Iran-Iraq war in 1980, the Baath regime believed that Iraqi Shi'a would support the Iranian regime as it is Shi'a as well. These fears resulted in the form of a serious attempt to neutralize Iraqi Shi'a from supporting Iran, by stressing and limiting the Iraqi Shi'a power. Preventing the Shi'a from their rituals is one of the methods used in the conflict between the Iraqi state-referenced Sunni and Iraqi Shi'a. This prohibition of Shi'a rituals, like walking, to visit the shrine of Al-Hussein in *Al-Arb'ain,* played a major role in enticing defying attitudes on the part of the visitors against the Iraqi government. For example in 1977, armed confrontations happened between security forces and the visitors near Karbala which shocked the authorities then because of the defying spirit they witnessed in the visitors. Such confrontations resulted in the negative attitude of the regime against the rituals of Shi'a practice, especially that of walking. Also, this added to the meaning of the rituals practiced by Shi'a; besides their religious indications, they also have political bearings signifying resistance against any attempts by the regime to undermine their common identity and stop them from practicing their religion.

G. Methodology

This study is based on a submission of anthropological, historical, and literary approaches. The ethnographic study of the Shi'a holy shrines between November 2011 and January 2012 is based on my visit to Iraq. The study lasted almost ten weeks, to include the two events under discussion: '*Ashurā and Al-Arb'ain*, in Karbala of that year.

In order to adequately deal with 'The Development of Iraqi Shi'a Mourning Rituals in Modern Iraq," and with a focus on the role of these rituals in the Shi'a society, I intend to use academic frameworks such as the sociology of religion, anthropology of religion, history of religion, and textual analysis of Arabic Islamic texts and literature. There are many symbols that can be studied under this topic that provide an important opportunity to explain the Iraqi Shi'a society. There are several common ideas among the Iraqi Shi'a rituals that deserve further study. These include, but are not limited to, the role of holy shrines, the rituals as practiced, and the groups that practice *'Ashurā* and *Al-Arb'ain* rituals in terms of: gender, age, and social class, along with the role of women in the Shi'a rituals.

As a researcher, I managed to gain valuable ethnographic data through studying the rituals of *'Ashurā* in Karbala, Baghdad, Najaf, and other Iraqi cities which observe this event; additionally, I collected material related to the social aspect of these rituals. Also, I came across many historical documents related to the subject of the study, and managed to record a number of different practices in preparation of *'Ashurā* when the major rituals of *majilis*, and mourning processions take place. Some video records and photos were taken for these

rituals, in addition to recording some stories and poems used in the rituals, reading historical books related to the subject of the study, and making field trips to the Shi'a cities and towns to observe at first hand some local practices like cooking and serving food to passengers. In addition, I took trips to the markets to look into the provisions usually bought in *Muharram* and *Safar*, the first and second month in the Islamic calendar, when the two occasions, *'Ashurā* and *Al-Arb'ain*, take place. Women's memorial services were also taken into consideration, as they are widespread in small towns.

The method of collecting ethnographic data followed the anthropological approach where material is collected through participant practices, which meant living close to the participants and participant observations. This facilitated reaching accurate understanding of these practices and reaching valid conclusions. I also had direct and formal interviews and meetings with important Shi'a scholars and personalities involved in organizing the practicing of rituals of *'Ashurā* and *Al-Arb'ain*, in addition to other meetings with regular participants and eye-witnesses, taking into consideration the variation of their education level and social background. The focus was on living the events in the Shi'a holy cities, and also some other cities which held distinguished celebrations of these events.

Despite the difficulties associated with carrying out this field research, which included the risk of violence and sheer physical exhaustion from the four day journey on foot from Najaf to Karbala, participating in the journey and rituals was of great benefit. The experience allowed for the first hand collection of data which

enriched the study and enhanced understanding of the emotions involved in these rituals.

H. Structure of Study

The first chapter explores the importance of studying the rituals practiced by Iraqi Shi'a Muslims in *'Ashurā* and *Al-Arb'ain*, and the purpose behind the rituals. This chapter also highlights the major obstacles I faced in conducting this research, while clarifying the scope of study and the reasons why I chose this period in particular (1968-2012). The first chapter also provides the position of Al-Hussein in Islam and attempts to introduce some terminology like '*Ashurā* and the visitation of *Al-Arb'ain*.

The second chapter deals with the rise of Shi'a Islam, the beginning and history of the divisions between Sunnis and Shi'a, the factors that led to the appearance of the Shi'a community, the difference between Shi'a divisions, and definition of the Twelver Shi'a. The battle of Karbala, which witnessed the martyrdom of Imam Al-Hussein and his family, is also explored highlighting, the major factors that led to it, as well as the reasons why the Shi'a in Kufa did not support their Imam. These reasons played a role in the later evolution of the mourning rituals. Also, this chapter deals with the rise of '*Ashurā* and *Al-Arb'ain* rituals and their development in Iraq after Karbala, during the different historical eras that succeeded the death of Al-Hussein: Umayyad, Abbasid, Buyid, Safavid, Qajar, Ottoman, British Mandate and Hashemite Monarchy, Republican, and the Baath regime. The chapter also sheds light on the development of the visitation of Al-Hussein's shrine in Karbala and the role it played in practicing the mourning

rituals on one side, and the rise of Karbala city as a religious center for Shi'a and the role this city played in their lives not only on the spiritual side, but also on the social, political and economic as well.

Chapter three studies the mourning rituals practiced by communities and individuals to express their sadness for losing their beloveds. I will offer a psychological analysis of the purpose of practicing mourning rituals as organized forms of the expression of sadness. The rituals help mediate and regulate the emotions of the mourners as they work through their sadness and mourning. The mourners manage to accept the loss of their loved ones and move on to accept life without having the departed as part of it any more. Also, the rituals are considered from a sociological angle, such rituals are practiced collectively so they increase social solidarity and assert common identity. Also, there is an anthropological point of view as the rituals are studied as a transitional stage helping the participants to move to another stage of social integration. From an Islamic point of view, there is a study of the Quranic verses, *hadith* narratives, and a number of Muslim scholars who referred to these rituals as strengthening religious concepts like piety, humility, and obedience to God's will. This angle highlights the difference between the Shi'a and Sunnis in practicing these rituals, especially the mourning of Imam Al-Hussein's martyrdom and *Al-Arb'ain*. In addition to this, the chapter studies the relationship between poetry and the mourning rituals generally as poetry can be a more articulate mode of expression. In the literature review section, I discussed the important sources that researched the topic in different time periods and perspectives. Finally, the chapter sheds light on the

identity of the individual Shi'a in relation to the practicing of these rituals and the changes they face trying to stop these rituals.

The fourth chapter presents the results of the field study of *'Ashurā* rituals practiced in Baghdad and Karbala in 2011. The study included the preparations of these rituals and the most common features related to the practicing of the rituals like spreading tents and hanging black flags on the roofs of houses, in addition to the changing of flags above the shrines of Al-Hussein and Al-Abbas in Karbala. This work also examines the *majilis* of mourning, for men and women, which are studied to highlight the factors function in these gatherings. This is in addition to the analysis of marching processions in the rituals, especially that of *zangeel* and *latmiya*, along with the passion plays (*tashabih*) that reenact the tragedy in the day of *'Ashurā*, *tatbir*, the burning of tents, running of *Twareej* and other features that are acted in these performances.

The fifth chapter studies the data collected from the field study of *Al-Arb'ain* visitation and the rituals practiced in this event, after accompanying the visitors on their four day journey from Najaf to Karbala. This data highlights the activities practiced during this journey, studying the groups of visitors and processions taking part in this visitation. The chapter also discusses the role of this visitation in the political resistance the Shi'a practiced against the ruling regime of the Baath, like the confrontation that happened between the visitors and the security forces in 1977.

Chapter six is devoted to discussing the important results obtained from the study. Also, I discussed the position of repetition as an important component to

practice rituals and its effect on the participants. This chapter also discussed the potential of this research and its development in further studies.

Chapter 2

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

A. Introduction[26]

For the Muslim Shi'a, mourning is related directly to the martyrdom of Imam Al-Hussein bin Ali in Karbala in 680 C.E. The significance of commemorating this event comes from the important role Imam Al-Hussein played in the history of Islam on the one hand, and in the history of the Shi'a on the other. He signifies a figure of resistance to tyranny for Shi'a Muslims. Imam Al-Hussein is one of the major figures for the Shi'a, representing a wide range of religious, political and moral concepts.

The events of Al-Hussein's martyrdom in *'Ashurā* and *Al-Arb'ain*, the 40th day anniversary of his martyrdom, are the most important events in the Shi'a calendar. The rituals of celebrating these two events are numerous and various, and express together the importance of Al-Hussein's martyrdom in the development of Shi'a Islam.

The person of Imam Al-Hussein holds a distinguished status and leading role in the structure of Islam, and in Shi'a teachings. He is the grandson of the Prophet Mohammad, the son of Ali (the first Shi'a Imam) and Fatima, and he is the martyr of Karbala, which made him a figure who symbolizes resistance against oppression and autocratic dominance. Al-Hussein defied the oppression practiced by the Umayyad rulers, fought in the battle of Karbala, where he was martyred, and became a symbol of Shi'a heroism and martyrdom for religious social justice,

[26] I attempted to use main primary sources in this study.

and freedom. Thus, the rituals of mourning his martyrdom, along with his followers', became the central event for Shi'a and commemorating this event represents a number of concepts beyond the mere expression of sadness.

This chapter is a historical background about the evolution of the mourning rituals in *'Ashurā* and *Al-Arb'ain* in Iraq. As these rituals evolved in result of a number of social factors, it is essential to first present a background of these factors and conditions that led to the appearance and development of the rituals. The first topics to be tackled are the Shi'a-Sunni division, its reasons and the basic teachings of Shi'a. Also the chapter highlights the difference between Twelver Shi'a and other Shi'a groups, as the present study concentrates on the mourning rituals practiced by the Twelver Shi'a in particular. The battle of Karbala and the Shi'a stand toward this battle will also be explained in addition to discussing the mourning rituals developed in its aftermath. Along with these topics, the chapter sheds light on the development of *'Ashurā* and *Al-Arb'ain* commemorates and their role in asserting the common identity of Iraqi Shi'a.

B. The Beginnings of Shi'a Islam

1. The Shi'a- Sunni Split

When the Prophet Mohammad died in 632 C.E., an everlasting disagreement started between Muslims over who would rule after him. According to important Islamic sources, Muslims were mostly divided into three parties: *Ansar* (the citizens of Medina who helped Prophet Mohammad when he emigrated from Mecca to Medina), *Muhajirun* (Muslims of Mecca who immigrated to Medina) and *Banu Hashim* (the relatives of the Prophet). The *Ansar* and *Muhajirun*

gathered in a place called *Saqifat bani Sa'idah*,[27] to appoint a successor, but this happened with the absence of *Banu Hashim*, who were busy with the burial and funeral of the deceased prophet.[28]

As these scholarly sources have shown, the issue was not simply just an egalitarian election or a hereditary action. Unlike what usually has been offered by Western scholars, the simplified version of the issue between the Shi'a and Sunni was more complicated, as the essential Islamic sources show. At that time, Shi'a and Sunni were not clearly formed, but at that time there were other groups like *Ansar*, *Muhajirun*, and *Banu Hashim*, each with their own distinct agenda.

The *Ansar* considered themselves the most deserving group to fill the leading position, for they argued that they were the ones who had provided shelter and moral and material support to the Prophet and *Muhajirun*. Thus, they nominated one of their leaders, namely, Saad bin Ubadah.[29] However, the *Muhajirun* believed that they deserved the leadership as they were the first to believe in the Prophet and his religion; they asserted that they were the first to believe in Allah and His messenger, they were his relatives and tribe and thus, it was only their lawful right to inherit leadership after his death.[30] The *Muhajirun* were represented in this meeting by Abu Bakr, Omar bin Al-Khattab, Abi Ubayda Al-Jarah and Mugherah bin Shuaba. The controversy between the two groups ended

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[27] See: Mohammed bin Jareer Al- Tabari, *Tareekh Al- Tabari: Tareekh Alrasool Wa Almalook*, Ed. Mohammed Abo Alfadl Ibrahim, Vol. 3, 2nd ed., (Egypt: Dar Al- Maaref, 1971) 203; Ahmad bin Yaha Al- Balathiry, *Ansab Alashraaf,* Eds. Suhayl Zakkar and Riyadh Zarkaly, Vol. 6, (Beirut: Dar Alfikr, 1996) 259; Ahmad bin Abi Yaaqub Al-Yaaqubi, *Tareekh Alyaaqubi,* Vol. 2, (Leiden: Brill, 1883) 136.
[28] Al- Balathiry 262; Al- Tabari 3:219.
[29] Al- Tabari 218.
[30] Al- Tabari 220.

with the appointment of Abu Bakr as the first successor of the deceased Prophet though some were not exactly in agreement with this choice, especially the leader of the *Ansar*, Saad bin Ubadah.

Banu Hashim denounced this nomination and accused Abu Bakr and Omar bin Al-Khattab of conspiring to take over leadership while Ali bin Abi Talib, one of the leading figures of *Banu Hashim*, was the most suited candidate for the new position: "Caliphate can't be taken by intrigues and we are the lawful owners of it as we have Ali to be the best candidate."[31] However, the *Banu Hashim* were not the only protesters against the election of Abu Bakr. Many of the *Muhajirun* and *Ansar* refrained from attending the meeting in *Saqifat bani Sa'ida* and preferred Ali bin Abi Talib as the next leader. Among these were Abbas bin Abdul Muttalib, Zubayr bin Al-Awam, Khalid bin Saeed, Muqdad bin Amro, Salman Al-Farisi, Abu Dharr Al-Ghifari, Ammar bin Yasir, Baraa bin Azib, and Obi bin Kaab.[32] Although all of these figures gave their allegiance to Abu Bakr as the successor of the Prophet, after Ali himself gave his support, these figures were the first nucleus of what would develop later to be the party of Ali or the Shi'a of Ali.

Abu Bakr ruled for only two years. Before his death in 634 C.E. he assigned one of his major supporters, Omar bin Al-Khattab as his successor.[33] During the era in which Abu Bakr and Omar reigned, Ali and his followers retired from

[31] Al- Yaaqubi 138.
[32] Al- Yaaqubi 138.
[33] Mircea Eliade, *A History of Religious Idea: From Muhammad to the Age of Referrers*, Trans. Alf Hiltebeitel and Diane Apostolos-Cappadona, Vol. 3, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985) 80.

public life and isolated themselves from state affairs.[34] After ten years of his rule, Omar was stabbed by his Persian servant, and did not survive the attack. He died in 644 C.E., but before that he selected six of the *Sahabah* (companions of the Prophet) to nominate his successor (*shura*) with a special kind of election strategy that definitely would assure the winning of Abdul Rahman bin Awf's candidate. The Shi'a version of this story that is told noted that Ali bin Talib was ignored when he rejected the conditions set by Abdul Rahman bin Awf to follow the policy of his predecessors Abu Bakr and Omar. When Uthman accepted these conditions, he was nominated the third Caliph; Ali set out angrily from the meeting but he was followed by the other members of the *shura* council to force him into supporting Uthman as the next ruler of the Muslim Caliphate.[35] The same people who objected to Abu Bakr's nomination protested again to the results of the *shura* council. Some went so far as to denounce Uthman's personality and praise Ali's in the Mosque of the Prophet itself.[36] However, things remained relatively quiet, and no such objections were made from the close supporters of Ali.

During the last years of Uthman's rule, there was major popular protest against his policies: he was accused of neglecting the people's interests, favoring his close relatives by giving them important positions in the state as well as bestowing them with lavish financial gifts, and ignoring the complaints of Egyptians and Kufans who had protested against the oppression by their governor

[34] Nabila Abdulmunaam Dawood, *Nashet Al- Shi'a,* (Beirut: Dar Al- Moa'rekh Al- Arabi, 1994) 55-56.
[35] Al- Balathiry 128; Al- Yaaqubi 186-7.
[36] Al- Yaaqubi 187.

who was Uthman's cousin.[37] Such claims and many others led to Uthman's assassination by rebels in 656 C.E. and the nomination of Ali bin Abi Talib as the fourth Caliph.

Between the *Saqifat bani Sa'ida* and the nomination of Abu Bakr (632 C.E.), and the assassination of Uthman and the nomination of Ali (656 C.E.), there were major changes that led to the rise of many Islamic groups and the formation of new alliances, which included Ali's party or Ali's Shi'a and some of the city of Kufa. They considered Ali as the first Caliph rather than the fourth, as they believed that the Caliphate should be only within the family of the Prophet and his progeny.[38] The new groups were comprised of those protesting against Ali and accusing him of neglecting the case of Uthman's murder; the most distinguished personality from among these groups was Aisha bint Abu Bakr, the deceased Prophet's wife. This group was known as the Camel group, named thus after the Battle of the Camel which happened between the army of Ali and the Camel army lead by Aisha. The battle ended with the defeat of the latter who ran away toward Sham (Syria) to join Muawiyah's army.[39] This group consisted of those who supported a relative of Uthman named Muawiyah bin Abi Sufyan, the governor of Damascus, who rebelled against Ali and tried to fight him. This group was known as the group of Siffin, named after the battle of Siffin which happened between them and Ali's army. In this battle of Siffin, when Muawiyah realized that he was losing the battle, he ordered his troops to raise copies of the Quran over their

[37] Al- Balathiry 133-4; Al- Yaaqubi 202.
[38] Eliade 81.
[39] Al-Hassan bin Musa Al-Nawbakhti, *Foreq Al Shi'a,* (Istanbul: n.p., 1931) 5-6.

heads and demand the arbitration according to the Quran.[40] This ended with the winning of Muawiyah's party because of the surrendering of Ali's representative in this arbitration.[41] Many of Ali's supporters refused this result and accused their leader of weakness; thus, they dissented and fought Ali until they assassinated him in 661 C.E. This dissenting group was known as the Kharijites (*Al-Khawarej*).[42] The last group which appeared during that period was the *Muatazila* (isolated); they were called as such because they refrained from fighting Ali as well as fighting with him.[43] Among all these divisions, two major groups were prominent: the group supporting Ali, known as the Shi'a of Ali, and the group supporting Muawiyah called the Shi'a of Muawiyah, as until that moment the word 'Shi'a' only meant supporters or followers. Thus, most of the people of Iraq were known as Shi'a of Ali and most people of Syria were known as the Shi'a of Muawiyah.[44]

Most of these parties and groups were the result of political conflicts between different sides for morale and financial gains which the seat of authority and power could guarantee, especially after The Righteous Caliphate (*Rashidun* Caliphate) era. This resulted in intellectual developments used by these movements to face and justify their political upheavals, and to develop a background that better suited the new reality. The rise of these parties and groups

[40] When someone raises the Quran over their head, then they are surrendering and need the Islamic arbitration. This occurs by the two disagreeing sides each nominating a representative to negotiate the case, and both decide on a decision that each side has to follow.
[41] This is one of the famous Islamic arbitrations that happened because the representative of Muawiyah deceived the representative of Ali.
[42] Eliade 81.
[43] Al- Nawbkahti 5.
[44] Ali bin Ismaail Al- Ashaari, *Maqalat Al Islameein*, Ed. Mohammed Muhiee Al-Din, Vol. 1, (Cairo: Maktabat Al-Nahtha Al-Masriyah, 1950) 14.

from these political conflicts did not separate them from their theoretical framework. The appearance of Shi'a as a political party did not lead to the loss of its basic Islamic principles, and within its structure, religion and politics remained connected in the Shi'a Muslim awareness.[45]

Some scholars attribute the first appearance of Shi'a to the concept of supporting Ali bin Abi Talib, and assert that from the beginning the rise of this movement was political in its implication. The first Shi'a personalities like Salman the Persian, Abu Dharr Al-Ghifari, Ammar bin Yasir, and Muqdad bin Al-Aswad, all were acting in support of Ali even when the Prophet was alive.[46] The Prophet used to love and respect them, and it is told that the Prophet said "Allah ordered me to love four and told me that he loves me, and he was asked to name them, he replied that Ali is among them, and the other three were Abu Dharr, Muqdad, and Salman."[47] This group and many others showed their support and respect for Ali from the beginning and in many occasions such as the *Saqifat bani Sa'idah* and *shura* councils after Omar bin Al-Khattab's assassination, and also in Ali's fight against Muawiyah.

After the assassination of Ali, Al-Hassan, his oldest son came to be the Muslim Caliph in 40 A.H. (661 C.E.). He was supported by Kufans and his father's advocates. His reign lasted for only six months. At the same time, Muawiyah bin Abi Sufyan was recognized as a Caliph as well in Damascus, and he led an army to fight Al-Hassan, but Al-Hassan abdicated for Muawiyah after

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[45] Heinz Halm, *Shiism*, Trans. Janet Watson and Marian Hill, (New York: Columbia UP, 2004) 1.
[46] Kamel Mustafa Ash- Shaibi, *Alsila Beyn Alteshayaa Wa Altasowaf*, Vol. 1, (Beirut: Dar Al-Andalus, 1982) 23.
[47] Ahmad bin Hajjar Al- Haytami, *Alsawaaiq Almohariqa Fi Alred Aala Ahl Albediaa wa Alzendaqa*, (Istanbul: Maktaba Al- Haqeeqa, 2003) 170.

long negotiations. The main reason for Al-Hassan's abdication was not only a political and military reason, but Al-Hassan did not have enough support and encouragement from his advocates, especially after an attempt of assassination by one of his followers. Al-Hassan thought conspiracy and lack of support were sufficient reasons to have accepted the peace treaty with Muawiyah.[48]

The treaty, according to which Al-Hassan abdicated to Muawiyah, included very important conditions and articles. One of these articles to be followed insisted that Muawiyah was not to appoint his own Caliph and had to establish a *shura* (election system).[49] Another article stated that Ali would not be cursed at in the presence of Al-Hassan.[50] The dispute between the Umayyad and Ali resulted in their adoption of a recommendation for their adherents to curse at Ali publicly during the whole reign of the Umayyad. Another one of these articles affirmed that safety should be granted to the Shi'a of Ali, and that they would not be persecuted or assaulted by the Umayyad and their adherents.[51] The nature of the peace treaty between Al-Hassan and Muawiyah reveals the powerful role of the Umayyad and their ability to run the crisis with their foes, and the weakness of the Shi'a of Ali and their fear of losing Caliphate to the Umayyad.

Muawiyah disowned all his treaties with Al-Hassan later on. He persecuted the Shi'a of Ali and killed some of them like, Hijr bin Adi Al-Kindi and Ali's most prominent companions in 671 C.E.[52] Muawiyah made the Caliphate position

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[48] Al- Yaaqubi 255-56.
[49] Al- Balathiry 287.
[50] Al- Tabari 5:160.
[51] Almuttahar bin Tahar Al-Maqdisey, *Kitab Al-Bidiaa wa Al-Taareekh,* Vol.5, (Cairo: Maktabat Al-Thiqafa Al-Deeniya, n.d.) 236.
[52] Al-Tabari 5:253.

hereditary and ordered people to recognize Yazid (647- 683 C.E.), his son, as Caliph. Al-Hussein refused to recognize Yazid as a Caliph and Muawiyah did not force Al-Hussein to do so.[53] Muawiyah knew the importance of Al-Hussein's position to Muslims and that he was the grandson of the Prophet. Since Al-Hussein did not support his refusal with power, Muawiyah did not want to make Al-Hussein's refusal, at the time, a bigger case so it would not affect the people who already recognized Yazid as a Caliph. Al-Hussein and the Shi'a resorted to silence toward the Umayyad during all of Muawiyah's reign.

2. Shi'a Groups

Ibn Mandhoor (1232-1311 C.E.), a well-known Arabic lexicographer and author of an Arabic dictionary, *Lisan Al-Arab* (The Arab Tongue), defines the word "Shi'a" as people who agree on something, and if they decided to do something together, they are called Shi'a; also any community that is solid and unified is Shi'a.[54] Moreover, Shi'a means group or community or supporters.[55] At that time, the word Shi'a didn't refer to certain group or people, but to any group of people that agreed on something.

Julius Wellhausen (1844- 1918 C.E.), one of the famous German Orientalist, recognized that the main conflict in the Islamic state from 632- 750 C.E. was the conflict between Arab Muslims and non-Arab Muslims *(Mawali)*. He argued that the word Shi'a started to be used to refer to Ali and his followers after Muawiyah

[53] Ali Ibn Mohammed Ibn Al-Atheer, *Asad Al-Ghaba fi Maarifet Al- Sahaba,* Vol.2, (Beirut: Dar Alkutub Al'almiya, n.d.) 27.
[54] Ibn Mandhoor, *Lisan Al Arab,* 4th ed., (Cairo: Dar Al Ma'ref, n.d.) 2377.
[55] *Al-Moaagem Al-Waseed,* 4th ed., (Cairo: Maktaba Al- Shirooq Al- Dowliya, 2004) 533.

started his rule as a Caliph, not just a head of a political party in Syria.[56] After his position as a head of the Syria party during the rule of Ali, Muawiyah became the next Caliph following Ali's assassination. He enjoyed total authority in his position as the ruler over all the Muslims' provinces, even Kufa,[57] a place inhabited by people who objected to his rule, and was once the residence of his rival, Ali. During his rule, the word "Shi'a" was used mainly to refer to the followers of Ali.

However, the term Shi'a was still holding some varieties of meanings according to additions that followed the word, like Shi'a of Imam Al-Hassan (son of Ali), Shi'a of Al-Hussein; this proves that the term didn't exactly mean what it means today until later in Islamic history. In the times of Imam Al-Hussein, the use of the term Shi'a to designate a group, started to have more of a definite meaning, as people started to say "Al-Shi'a" (the Shi'a) instead of saying Shi'a of Ali or of Al-Hussein. Moreover, the term Shi'a increased significance as it started to refer to those *Tawaboon* (Penitents) after Al-Hussein's death in Karbala, and their leader was called the *Sheikh* of Shi'a.[58]

It was known about the Iraqis then that they were mostly Shi'a, and Kufa was their major center. Because of the conflicts between Muawiyah, living in Sham (Syria), and Ali, living in Kufa, people of Iraq and people of Syria were involved in these conflicts on opposite sides. This involvement continued even after Ali

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[56] Julius Wellhausen, *The Religio-Political Factions in Early Islam*, (Amsterdam: North-Holland Publishing Co., 1975) 95.
[57] Kufa was established by the Islamic army leader, Saad Ibn Abi Waqqas in 638 C.E., after the war between the Muslims and Persians in 636 C.E. Kufa later on became the capital city of the Caliphate during Ali's rule in 656 C.E. Currently, Kufa is part of Najaf's governorate, and is 170 km south of Baghdad.
[58] Ash-Shaibi 22.

and the death of Muawiyah. Ali moved the capital of Islam from Medina to Kufa in Iraq. This was the first time such a change occurred, because he found in Kufa many supporters and followers who could aid him in his struggle against dissenters and rebels. They fought with him in his various wars, especially the battle of Siffin which took place against Muawiyah who had rebelled against Ali's rule.

Most Syrians supported their leader Muawiyah against Ali and the people of Iraq, both before and after Ali's death. Following Ali's death, Muawiyah became the Caliph; which led to the loss of the status of Ali's party and the civilians of Kufa. They were forced to accept Muawiyah's rule over themselves, but kept waiting for the right moment to redeem their lost status. The people of Kufa, remained faithful to Ali as a leader in their struggle against the Syrians and the new Caliph, and insisted that Kufa was the right capital of Islam rather than Damascus. Such views made the presence of Shi'a in Iraq go beyond their status as a religious group; "Shi'a" became a political expression on the part of Iraqis in Kufa who found in Ali a symbol of their lost status.[59] This was the main reason behind the spread of Shi'a Islam among Iraqis, particularly in Kufa. Most of these Kufis were the fighters who joined Ali in the battles of Camel and Siffin, and considering him as their religious, spiritual, and political leader; this compelled them to always support the sons of Ali, hoping this would bring back their glory which they had once experienced with Ali.

[59] Wellhausen 96.

Sunnis believed that the leader of all Muslims after the Prophet is the Caliph, and all Caliphs enjoyed equal status, being elected unanimously, while the Shi'a believed that Prophet Mohammed recommended Ali to succeed him, and every Imam should assign his successor in his own lifetime.[60] Ibn Hizim (994-1064 C.E.), an important Sunni Muslim Andalusian scholar, proclaims that everyone who agreed with the Shi'a that Ali was the best of the people after the Prophet and his rightful successor (and also his sons) are themselves Shi'a; and whoever disagrees with this assertation are not Shi'a.[61] As the Sunni did not recognize the rightfulness of Shi'a Imams in succeeding the Prophet, the Shi'a did not recognize or acknowledge the Caliphs who preceded Ali. The Shi'a believed that Abu Bakr, Omar and Uthman usurped their rights to succeed the Prophet, as Mohammed assigned Ali as Imam of Muslims after him; moreover, they believed that Ali did not approve these Caliphs, and he kept silent only to avoid crises.[62]

The term "Imam" in Arabic means the one who is to be followed.[63] It refers to any person who is followed, and is usually given a leading position.[64] The Imam is the person whom people follow, whether he is a president or else.[65] Imam can also refer to the leader of the prayer that Muslims follow. Thus, the Imam is the leader or chief of a nation, or a community, while the term "Caliph" means successor, which refers to the person who succeeds someone or something.

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[60] Moojan Momen, *An Introduction to Shii Islam*, (New Haven: Yale UP, 1985) 147.
[61] Ali bin Ahmad Ibn Hizim, *Alfasil Fi Almallel wa Alahwaa wa Alnahil*, Eds. Mohmmed Ibrahim Nasr and Abdulrahman Aumeza, Vol. 2, (Beirut: Dar Al-Geel, 1996) 270.
[62] Heinz Halm, *Shia Islam: From Religion to Revolution*, Trans. Allison Brown, (Princeton: Markus Weiner Publishers, 1999) 5.
[63] Mohammed bin Abi Bakr Al-Razi, *Mikhtar Alsahah*, (Beirut: Maktabat Lebanon, 1989) 22.
[64] Alkhalil bin Ahmad Al-Faraheedy, *Kitab Al-Ain,* Ed. Abdulhameed Hindawi, Vol. 1, (Beirut: Alkitab Al'almiya, 2003) 88.
[65] *Al-Moaagem Al- Waseed* 57.

"Caliph" is the one who succeeds someone else, and the Caliphate is the ruler ship of the government.[66] The concept of Imam and his function is the factor that differentiates between the various groups of Shi'a.

The Shi'a were divided into different groups, some developed and survived till our present day, some disappeared and became extinct. Today, there are three major Shi'a groups who are still active in different places of the world. They are: the Twelver Shi'a, who form the majority of Shi'a, then the Zaidi, and lastly the Ismaili.

The Zaidi group is called as such after their Imam Zaid ibn Ali, whose followers consider him the fifth Imam, being the grandson of Al-Hussein and brother of the fifth Imam to the Twelver Shi'a. He was killed in a revolt against the Umayyad Caliph Hisham bin Abd Al-Malik in 743 C.E. One of the major principles of Zaidi is that Ali bin Abi Talib is the best man after the Prophet, and that after Al-Hassan and Al-Hussein anyone of Ali's progeny can be the Imam, but it is a matter of *shura* "All the sons agree on the next Imam, and if one of these sons fought his right for it then he takes it, and can become the next Imam."[67] The Zaidis have an opposite opinion about Imamate to those held by the Twelvers, who believe that the current Imam assigns the one who succeeds him as the Prophet did when he assigned Ali as his next successor in *Ghadeer Khumm*.[68] *Ghadeer Khumm* is a day to commemorate Ali's appointment as the Prophet's successor. Shi'a Muslims consider it as a festive day (*Eid*) observed by on the

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[66] Ibn Mandhoor 1235.
[67] Al- Nawbakhti 31; Halm 202-3; John L. Esposito, *Islam: The Straight Path*, (New York: Oxford UP, 1991) 46.
[68] Jonathan P. Berkey, *The Formation of Islam: Religion and Society in the Near East, 600-1800*, (New York: Cambridge UP, 2003) 131.

18th of *Thu Al-Hujja*. Zaidis were the first Shi'a who managed to have an independent state through Hassan bin Zaid who established the Zaidi dynasty in Tabaristan near the Caspian Sea in 864 C.E., while the second Zaidi State was established in Yemen in 893 C.E. and lasted until 1963.[69]

The Ismaili Shi'a are the followers of Ismail, the oldest son of the sixth Imam Jaafar Al-Sadiq; the Ismaili Shi'a consider Ismail as the seventh Imam after his father, rather than his younger brother Musa bin Jaafar who is the seventh Imam according to the Twelvers. The historian of Shi'a groups, Al-Nawbakhti (d. 922 C.E-310 A.H), mentioned that the Ismaili believed in the Imamate of Ismail who died even before his father in 760 C.E., also that he was Al-Mahdi, who will never die, and that he is the successor as his father assigned him as the next Imam according to his friends and followers.[70] This is the major difference between Ismaili and Twelvers, as the first considered Ismail bin Jaafar the last Imam and Al-Mahdi who will return at the end of the world, while the Twelvers do not consider Ismail as an Imam and it is Mohammed bin Hassan Al-Mahdi that is the twelfth and last Imam who will come back at the end of the world.

In the tenth century, a branch of the Ismaili known as *Qaramita* (Qarmatians) established their state in Bahrain after they had already controlled parts of Southern Iraq, Syria and Palestine, while some other branches of Ismaili spread in the north of Africa and India, establishing the Fatimid Caliphate in Egypt in 969 C.E., made Cairo their capital and established the Al-Azhar School and Mosque.

[69] Esposito 46.
[70] Al- Nawbakhti 78.

Ismaili still follow the Imamate dynasty, their Imam today is Aga Khan whom his followers consider the forty-ninth Imam.[71]

The Twelver Shi'a form the majority of Shi'a in Iraq, thus the subject of the study will be considered mainly from their point of view.

3. Twelver Shi'a (*Ithna Ashariyya*)

These are the Shi'a who believe that Ali bin Abi Talib was the Imam of Muslims after the Prophet and his successor; his sons Al-Hassan and Al-Hussein followed their father in the Imamate which continues in the progeny of Al-Hussein till the 9th grandson, Mohammed bin Al-Hassan. Thus, they believe in twelve Imams after the Prophet, and hence they are known as Twelvers (*Ithna Ashariyya*). Also they believe that Allah assigned an Imam for every generation by designation (*nass*), who is considered the leader of his nation and has the highest authority (*wilaya*). This authority is religious, in its theoretical aspect at least, and also political.[72] They believe in certain qualifications for their Imam: he must be assigned by the Imam preceding him to be his successor, he must be infallible (*massum*), and the most knowledgeable person among his people.[73]

The most distinguishing quality of Twelver Shi'a is their belief in occultation (*Al-Ghayba)*, which emphasizes that the twelfth Imam Mohammad bin Al-Hassan, known as Al-Mahdi, did not die, but disappeared (*ghaeb)* by Allah's will and went into his major occultation in 941 C.E. This was not final as he would appear again before the end of the world to bring back justice to a world that had

[71] Halm 160.
[72] Berkey 131.
[73] Momen 153-55.

been filled with oppression.[74] The idea of Al-Mahdi is common to all Islamic divisions, but it is largely in Shi'a. The idea of Al-Mahdi is one of the central Shi'a especially the Twelver Shi'a. Twelvers believe in the coming back (*Al-Dhohor*) of Al-Mahdi from his occultation, because of the necessity of preparing for the Armageddon. Until that time, they refer all their questions to their religious leaders and scholars who represent the hidden Imam in his occultation. No one knows when Al-Mahdi will show up exactly, but they believe that his appearance will most likely be on the tenth of *Muharram*, in *'Ashurā* but no definitive year is assigned.[75]

One of the factors that helped in spreading the Twelver Shi'a was the conversion of Persians to Shi'a Islam in 1501 C.E. as announced by their Shah at that time, Ismail Safavi; who announced the Twelver Shi'a as the formal creed of the empire.[76] Shah Ismail brought Shi'a leaders from Iraq, Lebanon and Bahrain so that they could activate Shi'a principles which the Safavid kingdom needed to face Ottoman Sunni Islam on one side and by spreading Shi'a teachings on the other. In the political conflict between the Safavid Empire and the Ottoman Empire, both sides used any factors to support their side against the other. One of these factors that were used as support is the religious background. The Safavid used its Shi'a background, while the Ottoman used its Sunni background in their conflict. Among these principles is the celebration of *'Ashurā*, and practicing the mourning rituals for the martyrdom of Al-Hussein; these being the means that the

[74] Abdulaziz Abdulhussein Sachedina, *Islamic Messianism: The Idea of Mahdi in Twelver Shiism*, (New York: SUNY Press, 1981) 150; Momen 165.
[75] Halm 37.
[76] Momen 105.

Safavid dynasty followed to bring Persians to convert to Shi'a Islam, encouraging them to practice these rituals and make them an essential part of their Shi'a identity in the Safavid era.[77]

Shi'a constitute 10-20% of Muslims around the world, predominantly in Iran, Iraq, Azerbaijan and Bahrain.[78] They also exist as minorities in Kuwait, Qatar, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Tajikistan, and India. The Twelver Shi'a have a different status today; they are the majority in Iran, ruling the country religiously and politically since the Islamic revolution in 1979 C.E. In Bahrain, where they are the majority of their population, they are still searching for a better role in their country. As a minority living in an atmosphere surrounded by the opposing neighbors, the Sunni majority, the Shi'a in southeast Asia, for example Pakistanis, participate in Shi'a mourning rituals in a much more public way to assert their solidarity as a Shi'a community.[79] However, the Twelver Shi'a role in Lebanon is quite distinguished since 2000 when they succeeded in rising as a political power through the growth of Hizbollah as a struggle against the Israeli invasion of south Lebanon from 1978 to 2000.

In Iraq, Twelver Shi'a constitute almost 60% of its population, most of them are Arabs with small proportion of Kurds, Turkmens, and Iraqis of Persian origins.[80] For a long time, the Twelver Shi'a in Iraq ruled the Sunni minority

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[77] Kamel Mustafa Ash-Shaibi, *Alfikr Al-Shi'a wa Alnaziaat Alsoofeya hata Madlaa Alqurn Althanee Ashr Alhijri*, (Baghdad: Maktabat Alnahdha, 1966) 415-17.
[78] Momen 282.
[79] Vernon James Schubel, *Religious Performance in Contemporary Islam*, (Columbia: USC Press, 1993) 6.
[80] Graham E. Fuller and Rend Rahim Francke, *The Arab Shi'a: The Forgotten Muslims*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1999) 87.

which viewed Shi'a as a dangerous force against its political structure. I will discuss this point further on in this chapter. This was the reason that most of the Sunni governments that ruled Iraq forbid and fought against the practice of mourning rituals by Shi'a for they saw these rituals as a danger for their authority. The rituals were used by the Shi'a to show their solidarity as a community in the Iraqi nation. The situation didn't change until the American invasion in 2003, which led to the change in the government structure in the country, adopting a more democratic system. After having the first democratic election in Iraq in 2005 to elect the parliament and to write the constitution, Iraq became a federal republic. This new federal republic followed the Baath regime, which had ruled the country since 1968. In this unprecedented election, the Shi'a won the majority of votes and managed to form their first government in the modern history of Iraq.

When the American forces invaded Baghdad in April 2003, the first thing the Iraqis did was to bring down the statue of Saddam in Firdos Square, in the middle of Baghdad. However, the media and news agencies which were busy taking news from Baghdad were surprised to find that crowds of Iraqis in mourning outfits were heading on foot toward Karbala (100 km south of Baghdad) to perform the *Al-Arb'ain* visitation hailing the phrase "We'll never forget our Hussein." In this visitation almost two million Shi'a participated. As people watched, most of the Shi'a youth practiced the mourning rituals freely for the first time without the interference of authorities, putting on their black shirts and green scarfs.[81]

[81] Vali Nasr, *The Shia Revival*, (New York: W. W. Norton, 2006) 19.

C. Karbala

1. Al-Hussein Goes to Iraq

When Muawiyah died in Damascus in 61 A.H. (680 C.E.), his successor was his son Yazid. The new caliph asked his governor in Medina to take the *Bayaah* (oath of allegiance) from the inhabitants of the city, especially the three most notable figures there: Al-Hussein bin Ali, Abd Allah bin Umar (614- 693/694 C.E.) who is the son of the second Caliph Omar bin Al-Khattab, and Abd Allah bin Al-Zubayr (624- 692 C.E.), the son of one of the important companions of the Prophet, whose mother was Asma bint Abu Bakr (the first Muslim Caliph). Yazid's orders stressed the necessity of taking the oath of allegiance from these men even if by force.[82] Al-Hussein, however, refused to give his allegiance to Yazid expressing his rejection of Yazid's personality: "We are the Prophet's progeny and his family; we are the keepers of Allah's message, while Yazid is immoral, lecherous and wine drinker; people like me would never give allegiance to people like him."[83] Al-Hussein left Medina heading for Mecca with his family to avoid the governor of Medina who was nagging over his allegiance to Yazid.

During his stay in Mecca, Al-Hussein received a number of letters from the Shi'a in Kufa asking him to come to them so they could give him their allegiance as the Caliph instead of Yazid, as they had abstained from supporting Muawiyah's son.[84] Al-Hussein sent his cousin Muslim bin Aqeel to check the situation in Kufa: if things were as they claimed in their letters, then he would set

[82] Al-Tabari 5: 338.
[83] Najmaldeen Mohammed Ibn Nama, *Motheer Alahzan,* (Najaf: Almatbaa Al-Haydariya, 1950) 14.
[84] Al-Yaaqubi 288; Lut bin Yahya Abu Makhnuf, *Maktal Al- Hussein*, 2nd ed., (Qom: Intisharat Alshareef Alradee, 1995) 27.

out go to Kufa.[85] When Muslim bin Aqeel reached Kufa, he stayed with one of the notables in Kufa, Hani bin Urawa, where he was visited by thousands of Shi'a Kufans who gave him their pledge of allegiance to support Al-Hussein. Muslim bin Aqeel, therefore, sent a letter to Mecca telling Al-Hussein "those twelve thousands of Kufa citizens have passed their pledge of allegiance, and thus he should come to them."[86] However, this pledge happened secretly as Kufa was still under the Umayyad authority represented by the governor Nuaman bin Bashir.

When the number of Muslim bin Aqeel's supporters increased, the governor of Kufa knew what was planned, but he was relatively lenient with the Shi'a, an approach which was not well received by the other Umayyads in Kufa. They wrote to the Caliph in Damascus asking him to replace the governor for his weakness, and to send a stronger man to face the danger posed by Al-Hussein's arrival.[87] Thereby, Yazid asked his governor in Basra, Ubayd Allah bin Ziyad, to run the affairs of Kufa, to move there immediately and to kill Muslim bin Aqeel so that the Shi'a plan could be nipped in the bud. When Ubayd Allah bin Ziyad reached Kufa, he spoke to people and promised them rewards if they gave their pledge of allegiance to Yazid, but insisted that if they gave it to Al-Hussein, then Yazid would send an army to kill the men of Kufa and take their women as prisoners. When the citizens heard that, they panicked and decided not to interfere between conflicting leaders, and withdrew their pledge to Al-Hussein in order to

[85] Ahmad bin Dawwod Al- Daynori, *Alakhbar Altawal*, Ed. Fladdemir Girgas, 1st ed., (Leiden: Brill, 1888) 244.
[86] Al- Tabari 5: 348.
[87] Al- Tabari 5: 348.

support Yazid, instead.[88] With the help of the people of Kufa, Ubayd Allah bin Ziyad, captured Muslim bin Aqeel and Hani bin Urawa, killed them, and sent their severed heads to Yazid in Damascus.

Meanwhile, Al-Hussein was setting out from Mecca to Kufa in Iraq. He ignored all the warnings and advice of his relatives and followers who urged him to put off traveling to Kufa until he was certain of the stand of the Kufans.[89] However, Al-Hussein believed in the Shi'a who supported his father Ali, that they would support him also as their letters had expressed. On his way toward Iraq, Al-Hussein received the news of Muslim's death and the altered stance of the Kufans.[90] Then, Al-Hussein spoke to his people who had accompanied him to Iraq and told them about the changing circumstances and his disappointment in the citizens of Kufa. He added in his speech that by following him they would not find earthly blessings and they should be prepared for death; he gave them also the choice of leaving him and returning.[91] The people decided not to follow Al-Hussein anymore and turned their backs and returned to their homes. Only a few members of his family and supporters remained with him; they were hardly one hundred men.

The Umayyad leader, Al-Hurr binYazid Al-Ryahi, with his troops, surrounded the caravan of Al-Hussein ordering them to follow him to Kufa, but Al-Hussein refused to submit to these orders. After some arguments between the conflicting leaders, Al-Hurr binYazid Al-Ryahi proposed to Al-Hussein that he should take

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[88] Abu Makhnuf 40.
[89] Ali bin Al- Hussein Al-Masaaodi, *Muroog Althahab*, 2nd ed., (Beirut: Dar Al- Fikr, 1990) 52.
[90] Abu Makhnuf 66.
[91] Abu Makhnuf 66.

another route that would not lead him to Kufa, nor take him back to his home, and he would write to the Kufa governor asking for further orders. Thereby, Al-Hussein took his followers on a different route until new orders reached Al-Hurr binYazid Al-Ryahi which commanded him to once again surround Al-Hussein's caravan and forbid him from continuing his journey until further notice.[92] Al-Hussein then stopped in Karbala, a wasteland with no water resources, a few kilometers away from the Euphrates. By the next day, Ubyad Allah bin Ziyad sent an army of thousands of troops under the Umayyad leadership of Omar bin Saad to surround Al-Hussein's caravan.

Some regiments also settled on the banks of the Euphrates to prevent Al-Hussein's supporters among the Kufa citizens to come along to help their Imam,[93] and to prevent Al-Hussein's caravan from taking water from the river.[94]

It was another means of torture and inflicting pressure on Al-Hussein's people to prevent them from reaching the river so that he would yield and give his pledge of allegiance to Yazid. Ibn Al-Atheer (1160-1233 C.E.), the well-known historian, mentions preventing Al-Hussein and his people from water before his martyrdom, and one of the troops in Omar's army addressing Al-Hussein in the following words: "Al-Hussein, do you see how the water shines like piece of sky, but you will never taste any drop of it till you die."[95] Shi'a sources that tackled *Maqtal Al-Hussein* tell that when the thirst became severe, Al-Hussein sent his brother Al-Abbas with twenty men to bring water to their camp; this was on the seventh of

[92] Abu Makhnuf 75.
[93] Al-Tabari 5: 449.
[94] Abu Makhnuff 84; Ali bin Mohammed Ibn Al-Atheer, *Alkamil Fi Altareekh*, Ed. Abi Alfada Abdullah Alkadi, Vol. 3, (Beirut: Dar Alkutub Al'almiya, 1987) 411.
[95] Ibn Al-Atheer 3:413.

Muharram.[96] That is why Shi'a mourners assign the seventh day to celebrate the martyrdom of Al-Abbas in their rituals in celebrating the anniversary of the battle.

On the night of the tenth of *Muharram* 61 A.H. (680 C.E.), Omar bin Saad offered Al-Hussein the choice between surrendering or fighting. After meeting with his family and supporters to seek counsel, Al-Hussein told them they could all go back as the enemy was seeking him only. However, all insisted on staying with their Imam.[97]

2. Martyrdom of Al-Hussein and His Family

On the morning of the tenth day of *Muharram* 61 A.H., 10th of October 680 C.E., Al-Hussein gathered all the men among his family and supporters, which numbered seventy-two, to face the army surrounding them. After he asked the women and children to stay in their tents, he ordered that they be surrounded them by a trench filled with fire to protect them.[98] Among Al-Hussein's followers were those who joined him on his route toward Iraq; some who were from Kufa who reached him before he was surrounded by Omar bin Saad's army, which stood now with thousands of men ready to fight the seventy-two.[99]

Before the battle broke out, Al-Hussein was asked for the last time to surrender, but he refused asserting his stance by saying "I will not be humbled, nor will I give in like a slave."[100] However, Al-Hussein approached Omar ibn Saad's army in a last attempt to persuade them not to fight him, reminding them

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[96] Abd Al- Razaq Mohammed Al- Moqarrim, *Makhtal Al- Hussein*, 5th ed., (Beirut: Dar Alkutub Alislamiya, 1979) 204-5.
[97] Al- Tabari 5: 420.
[98] Abu Makhnuff 99.
[99] According to Abu Makhnuff, Al-Hussein's followers amounted to 72 men, while Omar ibn Saad's army amounted to 80,000 men.
[100] Ibn Al- Atheer 3:419.

that he was the grandson of the Prophet Mohammed, and the son of his trustee Ali; he also reminded them of the famous quote by the Prophet in clarifying the status of Al-Hussein and his brother Al-Hassan when he said "You are both the lords of Heaven's youth."[101] He told them that such reasons are enough for them to refrain from fighting him, and he came to Iraq because they asked him to do so. They answered him promptly that they did not![102] Al-Hurr binYazid Al-Ryahi, one of the leaders in the surrounding army, was influenced by the words of Al-Hussein; thus, he left Omar bin Saad's army and joined the side of Al-Hussein, regretting his stand against his Imam. Most of Omar bin Saad's army gave Al-Hussein's speech a deaf ear and insisted that he should surrender to them. After realizing the futility of argument, Al-Hussein retreated back to his small army waiting for the battle to begin.

The battle started with the throwing of darts by Omar bin Saad's army toward Al-Hussein's, after that it became individual and group duels between the two parties. Each of Al-Hussein's supporters, before they set off toward the battle, approached their Imam renewing their pledge of allegiance to him as they did with his father.[103] The battle took longer than was usual at that time because of the individual duels, which were planned by Al-Hussein and his followers as they were of a smaller number facing a huge army. When his opponent realized the plan, Omar bin Saad gave orders to his troops to advance together as a group because Al-Hussein and his followers were known for their skills in fencing, in

[101] Ibn Al- Atheer 3:419; Al- Tabari 5: 425.
[102] Ibn Al- Atheer 3:419; Al- Tabari 5: 425.
[103] Al- Tabari 5: 444.

addition to their outstanding bravery.[104] By the afternoon, most of Al-Hussein's supporters and followers were killed in the battle, and the only ones who remained were his family members who were already ready to fight.

The first of his family to approach the battle was his eldest son, Ali Al-Akbar, who after fighting bravely, was surrounded by a group of troops who killed him and cut his body with their swords.[105] Al-Hussein's brothers and cousins continued fighting one after the other until it was the turn of Al-Qasim bin Al-Hassan, his young nephew, who also took his sword and joined his uncle until he was killed.[106] After almost all of the male members of the family were killed, Al-Abbas, the only surviving fighter, tried to bring water for the women and children. Both Al-Hussein and Al-Abbas set toward the river but they were interrupted by a group of troops who surrounded them. While they were fighting, Al-Hussein was shot and injured by several darts, separating him from Al-Abbas. Al-Abbas was surrounded by a number of fighters and then they killed him after a strong defense on his part. Al-Hussein was notified that the troops had invaded his family's tent. So, when Al-Hussein tried to go back to his place near the tents of the women and children, he was interrupted by the troops led by Shimr bin Thil-Jawshan who kept fighting him from all sides until he fell on the ground. Upon seeing him lying there, Shimr came to Al-Hussein and cut off his head in front of the remaining members of his family, which were mostly women and children. Then, the army

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[104] Al- Tabari 5: 435.
[105] Al- Tabari 5: 446.
[106] Shi'a tradition tells of this boy's intention to marry, but his martyrdom ended all the preparations of his wedding. Although the books tackling *Maqtal Al-Hussein* or the battle of Karbala do not mention this wedding, the event forms a major part in the celebration rituals in the anniversary of Karbala.

attacked the camps which were now void of male fighters, while the women and children tried to escape toward the desert. Some of Omar's army set to plunder the tents, taking Al-Hussein's clothes and in some cases, even tearing off the women's clothes from their bodies.[107] The story of the death of Al-Hussein, when it is narrated by the Shi'a is done so in a passionate manner, giving more details about each individual in this story. Some of the events of the battle have proof in historical sources, others are meant to create a dramatic tragedy without actual historical proof.

The early historians of this battle, like Abu Makhnuf (d. 773-74 C.E.), Al-Tabari (838-923 C.E.), and writers of the death of Al-Hussein *Maqtal Al-Hussein* like Ibn Tawoos (1193-1246 C.E.) and Ibn Nama (1171-1247 C.E.), give more detailed narration of the events in Karbala. Such details clarify specifically how each member of Al-Hussein's army was killed in addition to full details about each one's background and their killers. The books of *Maqtal* which were written in later times concentrated on giving the detailed emotional dimension of the event to influence the audience and win their sympathy toward the martyrs. Thus, the books of *Maqtal Al-Hussein* devoted a number of pages to each member in Al-Hussein's family clarifying each one's role in the battle and how each participated in the army before being killed by the enemy. Such detailed narration always influenced the readers and greater audience of Al-Hussein's story. One of the details, for example, that has been related by Ibn Tawoos, suggested that Al-Hussein's wife approached him during the battle with her infant son to ask the

[107]Al- Tabari 5: 455.

opponent army for some water as the infant had not drunk water for three days. In compliance with her request, Al-Hussein took the infant, carried him high in his hands to ask the army for water for the child but instead, one of the enemy's troops threw a dart and killed the infant.[108]

After the end of the battle, the heads of Al-Hussein and his followers were raised on the spears of the winning army so all could see them, thereby frightening the viewers of the Shi'a in Kufa and other cities. Women, children and Ali bin Al-Hussein- who was the only one of Al-Hussein's sons to survive as he was seriously sick at the time of the battle and could not participate in the fight- were all taken prisoners and sent to Kufa to the governor's place.[109] The governor Ubyad Allah bin Ziyad gave an order to have the heads displayed around the streets of Kufa,[110] so the citizens of Kufa would be terrified and would never think of seeking revenge for their Imam or rebel against their ruler Yazid. After that, they took the prisoners' caravan along with eighteen heads of Al-Hussein's relatives to the palace of the Caliph Yazid in Syria as a proof that military action against Al-Hussein's movement had ended successfully. After spending days in Damascus, Yazid allowed Ali bin Al-Hussein to take his family to their home in Medina as Yazid realized that keeping them in Syria might endanger his authority because of the status Al-Hussein enjoyed as a spiritual leader. Also, he gave orders that the head of Al-Hussein be returned to the body in Karbala.[111] The battle of Karbala caused enormous controversy among Muslims at that time,

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[108] Ali Ibn Musa Ibn Tawoos, *Almalhoof Ala Katla Al-Tofoof*, (Tehran: Dar Aliswa, 1992) 169.
[109] Al- Tabari 5: 455.
[110] Ibn Tawoos 203.
[111] Ibn Tawoos 225.

endangering the authority of the Umayyad rule as they were the killers of Al-Hussein and his family.

Al-Hussein bin Ali and Yazid bin Muawiyah bin Abi Sufyan represent the second generation of Muslims, and they had inherited former hostility that existed between their parents. Yazid's ideas were more than an extension of the ideas of his father's side to emerge as a governor rather than as a man of religion on the one hand, while Al-Hussein's was also an extension of the line of his father as a religious leader seeking to move forward to embrace the ideas of essential Islamic thoughts espoused by Ali bin Abi Talib in his struggle against Muawiyah, on the other hand. This conflict between these two ideologies continued later on and developed more in the Umayyad and the Abbasid era. The Caliphate position as the authority of the ruling class basis came first, and the religious issue came second, after the government's priorities. Therefore the conflict between the governing authority and Shi'a became continuous between the two sides and did not terminate.

This conflict would escalate at some times and calm down at others. For example, during the Umayyad era with Omar bin Abd Al-Aziz (682-720 C.E.), and during the Abbasid era with the Caliph Al-Mamun (786- 833 C.E.), the conflicts calmed down. While, during the Abbasid era with the Caliph Al-Mutawakel (822- 861 C.E.) and during most of the Umayyad era, such as the Caliphs Marwan bin Al-Hakam (623- 685 C.E.) and Al-Waleed bin Abd Al-Malik (668-7 15 C.E.), the conflicts escalated. During this long conflict, rulers evolved approaches and methods against Shi'a and some approaches became clear in the

Islamic state at various times. On the other side, Shi'a came to represent the role of the opposition in the Islamic state, which is also what led them to develop their tactics in the confrontation and address in this conflict. Among the most important of these techniques invested and developed by the Shi'a in their struggle against successive Islamic governments since the Umayyad, is the advantage of the battle of Karbala and the martyrdom of Al-Hussein as one of the most important means of facing rejection and protesting the government.

3. Shi'a in Kufa and their Stand toward Karbala

The stands and attitudes of people in Kufa did not actually express the spiritual solidarity and awareness for which early Shi'a had always shown. Except for the few arrested by the governor police, and those who managed to join Al-Hussein in Karbala, most of the supposed supporters and followers failed to express this support as well as falling short of showing the Shi'a solidarity in Kufa.

In light of these factors, it appears most of the supporters of Al-Hussein in Kufa were not actually supporting him for spiritual reason or were they similar to the early Shi'a as Salman the Persian, Abu Thur, Ammar bin Yasir, who supported Imam Ali for his role and position in Islam. The supporters of Al-Hussein in Kufa were Shi'a for political reasons, motivated by their support of Ali's policy against that of Muawiyah. However, these reasons were not sufficiently developed or strong enough to with stand the Umayyad polices of brutality. Thereby, they could not summon the stamina necessary to support Al-Hussein in Karbala, leaving their Imam and his family to face their tragic destiny

alone. Moreover, the memory of Ali's rule in Iraq "was always connected with the Shi'a cause, which made most of the Iraqis support Ali without being actually Shi'a as they thought that Iraq would be the leading place among others in the Islamic kingdom."[112] Chieftains of Arab supporters of Al-Hussein were bribed with fortune, while the stand of non-Arabs *mawali* was mixed with fear from the authority represented by the Arabs majority.

The background of Al-Hussein's supporters, who were mostly people of Kufa since they were living in the Islamic capital city that was appointed by the Imam Ali (the father of Al-Hussein), especially the *mawali*, reveals the reasons behind the change in their attitudes toward their leader. On one side, they were searching for an opportunity to improve the standard of their lives, and they were not ready yet to achieve their goal. However, their positions started to be stronger after the battle of Karbala as they realized the necessity of changing their realities which became worse after Yazid took over power. He considered them as second rate citizens among Arabs. This led to the *Tawaboon* (Penitents) rebellion, which started four years after the battle of Karbala, as repentance for not supporting their Imam. Besides being a manifesto for a group which included those trying to achieve its political and social goals, Al-Hussein's martyrdom was only coverage for these goals. Most of the members of this movement were the *mawali* demanding equality with their Arab peers as well as seeking a change in their social status.[113] Until that time there was no real structure for Shi'a Islam, but the

[112] Abd Alazziz Al- Doory, *Moqedima Fi Tareekh Sadr Al- Islam*, (Beirut: Dar Alkitab Alibnany, 1960) 61.

[113] Mohammed Mehdi Shamsaldeen, *Ansar Al- Hussein*. 3rd ed. (Beirut: Almuassassa

movement of *Tawaboon*, led by Shi'a after Al-Hussein's death, was like the spirit that gave life to the movement.[114]

D. The Rise and Development of Mourning Rituals

1. The Umayyad Era (661 C.E. - 750 C.E.)

It was claimed that there were a number of funerals organized for the martyrdom of Al-Hussein and his followers; among these early mourning rituals were those organized by the women in the house of Yazid after the female prisoners of Al-Hussein's family reached Damascus. Al-Tabari mentions that the female members of Al-Hussein's family were imprisoned, "left till they entered the house of Yazid and all the women in Muawiyah's family welcomed them with crying and wailing for the loss of Al-Hussein; they mourned him three days."[115] The participation of Muawiyah's family in the rituals of mourning and funerals for Al-Hussein's death was mainly motivated because one of Yazid's wives, Hind bint Abdullah bin Aamir, was well-connected with a good relationship with the family of Al-Hussein,[116] as it was thought that she spent some years in Ali's house when her father died, before marrying Yazid and living in Damascus.[117]

However, the earliest sign of organizing mourning rituals by the Shi'a as a group goes back to the commemoration done by *Tawaboon* in 685 C.E., four years after the battle of Karbala; these memorial services had a political atmosphere. Ibn Al-Atheer mentions that under the leadership of Sulyman bin

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Alduweliya Lildirasat wa Alnashir, 1996) 94.

[114] Marshall G.S. Hodgson, "How Did the Early Shia Become Sectarian?" *The Formation of The Classical Islamic World: Shiism,* Ed. Etan Kohlberg, (Burlington: Ashgate, 2003) 5.

[115] Al- Tabari 5:462.

[116] Al- Tabari 5:465.

[117] Mohammed Mehdi Al- Haairy, *Maalem Alsubteen Fi Ahwal Al- Hassan wa Al- Hussein,* (Qom: Subh Al- Sadiq, 2004) 578.

Sard Al-Khuzaee, *Tawaboon* marched by the thousands raising the banner "*Ya litharat Al-Hussein*" (To Revenge Al-Hussein) and, "They ended at the grave of Al-Hussein; as they arrived there, they all shouted in unison with unprecedented number of mourners… They spent a day there in mourning for the killed Imam and his followers."[118] The rituals of mourning continued by the *Tawaboon* consisted of visiting the tomb of Al-Hussein to show their regret for the loss of their Imam by reciting elegies. These elegies distinguished the memorial services from others; they were mixed with feelings of rebellion and revolt against the ruling authority. Thus, some of these activities did not express sadness because of Al-Hussein's martyrdom, as much as expressing the regret, sense of guilt, and a plea for forgiveness for their negative attitude about refraining from supporting their Imam in *'Ashurā*. These feelings established the annual *'Ashurā* rituals.[119]

Whether the rituals sprang from emotional or political grounds, they remained secretly practiced. They were of limited scope during the Umayyad era because of the severe consequences faced by whoever participated in them. Penalties were also inflicted on poets who led others to mourn Al-Hussein and his followers through their poems; this tactic was used by many poets to mention the event.[120] For example, some of the poets who wrote elegies for Al-Hussein in the Umayyad reign are Al-Sayyid Al-Himiary (723- 789 C.E.), Al-Kumait Al-Asady (died 743 C.E), Jaafer Bin Affan (d. 767 C.E.), and Abu Omara Al-Monshid.[121] Most of

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[118] Ibn Al- Atheer 4: 4.
[119] Heinz Halm, *Shiism*, (New York: Columbia UP, 1999) 41.
[120] Ali bin Al- Hussein Al- Asfahany, *Maqatil Al- Talibeyeen*, (Najaf: Maktabat Al- Haydariya, 1865) 81.
[121] Hibat Al-Dain Al- Shahrastani, Nahdat al-Hussein. (Baghdad: Maktabat Aljawadayn 1969), 205-7.

their poems were recited secretly in mourning councils at Al-Hussein's grandson's house, the sixth Shi'a Imam Jaafer Al-Sadiq (702–765 C.E.). Moreover, the Umayyads tried to delete all references to Karbala from the books of history and literature so that the memory of Al-Hussein and the battle would sink into oblivion. Yet, the irony is that the more authorities led to stop these rituals, the more people were encouraged to organize these memorial services annually as well as to recite the happenings of the battle orally.[122]

Many Shi'a sources mention that the Imam succeeding Al-Hussein, like Ali bin Al-Hussein and Mohammad Al-Baqir, were persistent in referring to the battle and concentrated on its spiritual implication to show the tragedy that it involved. Mohammed Al-Baqir exerted great efforts to continue with the tradition like his father Ali bin Al-Hussein, by organizing the rituals of crying and reciting the events of the battle in his own house, to avoid conflicts with Umayyad authorities. He tried also to establish certain bases for these rituals of mourning, among these were to emphasize the visiting of Al-Hussein's shrine on *Ashurā*, crying there, reciting elegies, and organizing memorial services with family members; besides which he considered *'Ashurā* a public mourning day for Shi'a in which no work was to be done if it was not related to the mourning of Karbala.[123]

2. The Abbasid Era (750 C.E.- 1258 C.E.)

Opposite to what the Umayyad used to dictate, Shi'a during different periods of the Abbasid Caliphate encountered a more tolerant attitude toward the practice

[122] Ali J. Hussain, "The Mourning of History and the History of Mourning: The Evolution of Ritual Commemoration of the Battle of Karbala," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 25.1 (2005): 82.
[123] Jaafar bin Quluweh Al- Qomi, *Kamil Alziyarat,* (Beirut: Muassasat Al Fikr Al-Islami, 2012) 217-18.

of their mourning rituals. Abbasid used the battle of Karbala as a pretext to motivate resistance against the Umayyad dynasty, demanding revenge for the martyrs of Karbala from their killers, the Umayyad.[124] With such propaganda, the Abbasid dynasty managed to overthrow the Umayyad.

In spite of the ebbs and flows in the relationship between the Abbasid Caliphate and Shi'a, the mourning rituals were practiced with greater freedom than was probable during the Umayyad era, especially during the time of Al-Mamun's rule (786-833 C.E.), during which many memorial services were held. These were known as wailing sessions in which melodist poems of elegy were recited to remember the memory of Al-Hussein's martyrdom in Karbala. The third century in the Islamic calendar witnessed the public appearance of the wailing bard's name, who recited melodist poems in *majlis*; poets like Daabil Al-Khuzaee (765-860 C.E.) and Al-Nashee Al-Asghar (884-975 C.E.) were the earliest poets who started the tradition of wailing over the martyrdom of Al-Hussein.[125]

During the time of the seventh Twelver Imam Musa Al-Kadhum (745-799 C.E.), when Al-Mamun was the caliph, the mourning rituals developed at the institutional structural level. At that time the rituals of mourning began to include several activities that over time became an essential part of mourning the death of Al-Hussein, like crying, remembering the particulars of the battle regularly, and remembering Al-Hussein when drinking water. In this period, traditions developed such as crying for Al-Hussein's death in *'Ashurā*, holding memorial

[124] Al- Shahrastani 209.
[125] Al- Shahrastani 215.

services in private houses to celebrate his martyrdom, receiving condolences for the tragic death from each other, allowing *latm* as well as excessive panic, the visitation of Al-Hussein's shrine, starting the month of *Muharram* with signs of sadness and mourning, abstaining from work in *'Ashurā*, imagining the battle or dramatizing it, dressing in mourning, and abstaining from drinking or eating from morning until sunset.[126] Thus, after being limited in its scope and activities, practiced secretly in the houses of Al-Hussein's followers with some spontaneity, the mourning rituals became more definite in terms of structure and procedures, developing over time become an essential part of the Shi'a identity.

The first appearance of the memorial services known as *majlis* with wailing sessions motivated writers and historians to write the story of *Maqtal Al-Hussein* which narrates the story of Al-Hussein's death and the battle of Karbala in detail. These books of *Maqtal* appeared in a later period written by Ibn Tawoos (664-589 C.E.) and Ibn Nama (d. 685 C.E.). The wailing sessions developed to be *majlis* of narration of the story of *Maqtal*, and along with this the name of the wailing bard or poet became *qari* (reader or reciter) and was used to describe those who celebrate in melodist poems or prose recitation of the story of *Maqtal* in Iraq until the present time.[127]

3. The Buyid Era (934 C.E.- 1055 C.E.)

The most important development in the rituals of mourning happened during the Buyid era; after they conquered Iraq in 945 C.E., the Shi'a started practicing

[126] Mohammed Salih Al- Joowayni, "Tareekh Almaatem Al-Husseiny min Alshahada wa hata Alaasr Alqajarey," *Jadal wa Mowaqif fi Alshaair Al-Husseiniyya,* Ed. Haydar Huballah, (Beirut: Dar Al- Hadi, 2009) 32-33.
[127] Ibrahim Al- Haydari, *Trajidiya Karbala: Susyulujiya Al-Khitab Al-Shi'i*, (London: Dar Al Saqi, 1999) 53.

their rituals of mourning on a formal level for the first time in the history of these rituals. Ibn Al-Jowzey, as well as Ibn Al-Atheer, both mentioned that in 302 A.H. (914 C.E.), the Buyid Sultan Muaizz Al-Dawla gave orders to hold memorial services of *'Ashurā* in Baghdad, and he closed markets, installing tents to host the wailing sessions, and sent wailing women crying and slapping their faces in grief over Al-Hussein's death.[128] These rituals began to be held annually, and for the first time *'Ashurā* became an official holiday to celebrate the event with mourning and wailing over the tragedy of Al-Hussein.[129] That was the first time that the authorities of Iraq supported these rituals and their public practice, previously they were limited to Shi'a and close relatives of Al-Hussein and his supporters. The Abbasid Caliphate had now come under the control of the Buyid dynasty who were a Shi'a Imamate and descended from Zaidi Shi'a.[130] The development of the mourning rituals during the era of the Buyid dynasty advanced the practices to another level which was to become deeply integrated within the traditions of Shi'a Islam.

Sunnis did not approve of the public practice of these rituals by Shi'a in Baghdad which motivated them to invent another practice to counter the rituals of Shi'a in *'Ashurā*. Sunnis changed the day of *'Ashurā* into a mourning the day for Musab bin Al-Zubair.[131] The Sunni's mourning over Musab's death was

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[128] Abdulrahman Ibn Al- Jowzey, *Almontatham fi Tareekh Almulook wa Alommam*, Eds. Mohammed Abdulqader Aata and Mustafa Abdulqader Aata, Vol. 14, (Beirut: Dar Alkitab Al'almiya, 1992) 280; Ali bin Mohammed Ibn Al- Atheer, *Alkamil Fi Altareekh*, Ed. Abi Alfada Abdullah Alkadi, Vol. 7, (Beirut: Dar Alkutub Al'almiya, 1987) 280.
[129] Ibn Al- Jowzey 7:210.
[130] Momen 75.
[131] Musab bin Al-Zubair was the governor of Iraq after the *Tawaboon*'s leader Al-Mukhtar al-Thaqafi who was demanding with the rest of *Tawaboon* revenge for Hussein. Musab was killed by the Abd Al-Malik bin Marwan Army in 691 C.E., 72 A.H. during the times that witnessed conflict

considered a means to confront the Shi'a mourning rituals; consequently it led to conflicts between Shi'a and Sunni in Baghdad in 353 A.H. (964 C.E.), resulting in destructive riots on markets with a number of causalities.[132] This was perhaps the first time in which Sunnis held mourning rituals over an Islamic figure following the same pattern as the Shi'a following in their mourning of Al-Hussein. However, the recurrence of violence because of the Shi'a-Sunni conflicts forced authorities to interfere and issue orders to ban *'Ashurā* rituals in 393 A.H. (1002 C.E.). The general of the Buyid army prohibited all kinds of mourning rituals whether they were held by Shi'a like the wailing over Al-Hussein, or these held by Sunnis to honor the memory of Musab bin Al-Zubair.[133]

These confrontations between the citizens of Baghdad over practicing mourning rituals reflects to a certain extent the influence of these rituals on the daily life of these people, which eventually made these citizens more aware of their communal identity as Shi'a or Sunni. While Shi'a were practicing their mourning rituals publically after centuries of banning, trying in the newly lived freedom to express the Karbala tragedy as an essential part of their intellectual development as a group and their identity as a religious denomination, Sunnis in Baghdad also tried to produce a symbol- Musab- to express their identity and background, a symbol that withstands the one presented by the Shi'a- Al-Hussein - as a means to balance the two denominations. Thus, the mourning rituals

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over Caliphate between Abd Al-Malik bin Marwan, whose capital was Damascus and Abdullah bin Al-Zubair, whose capital was Mecca. For more details see: Aaimad Aldeen Asmail Bin Katheer, *Albidaya wa Alnihaya,* Vol. 12, (Cairo: Dar Hajr, 1998) 139, 144.

[132] Ibn Al- Atheer 7: 286.

[133] Ibn Al- Jowzey15: 37.

practiced in Baghdad were not just an expression for the loss or tragedy inflicted on someone dear, but also the expression of collective identity within the social circles.

The memorial services and *majlis* held by Shi'a to mourn their killed Imam did not stop with the official prohibition issued by the Buyid authorities. During the last decade of their rule, the Turkish Sunni Saljoukid overtook the Caliphate in 447 A.H. (1055 C.E.). In spite of the attempts of these new Caliphs to prohibit the *'Ashurā* mourning rituals of Shi'a in Baghdad, these practices did not stop completely, but continued using any innovative means possible. In 458 A.H. (1065 C.E.), Shi'a in the Al-Karkh side of Baghdad closed their shops and brought women wailing to hold memorial service for Al-Hussein, while walking behind some funeral to distract the authorities.[134] The mourning rituals of *'Ashurā* started to take different forms to survive against all attempts to stop them, it became strong enough to invent means for practice under whatever circumstances, even when the Sunni authorities of Saljokid rule banned them.

4. The Safavid and Qajar Eras (1501 C.E.- 1925 C.E.)

The drastic change that happened in the Shi'a mourning rituals came with the Safavid who adopted the Twelver Shi'a Islam in 1501 C.E. The Safavid used the mourning rituals and memorial services of *majlis* as means to spread the Shi'a teachings in Iran and thereby they spread their own power. Shah Ismail, who had a Sufi background, introduced new rituals of mourning in Iran that reflected to certain extent this background in order to help in spread Shi'a teaching in Persia.

[134] Ibn Al- Jowzey 16: 94.

This appeared in the form of organizing memorial services in *'Ashurā* as well as introducing the third testimonial phrase: "I testify that Ali is *Wali* Allah" in the call to prayer *(Al-Athan)* and in Islamic testimonies.[135] Such rituals found popularity in Persia where people were inclined toward spiritualism and Sufism as essential parts of their national identity. It was also known that Safavid kings and princes personally participated in the '*Ashurā* rituals, attending the memorial services held in the streets while wearing the mourning black garments. Some of them even insisted on holding a memorial service for Al-Hussein while they were in the battle -field, like Shah Abbas in 1011 A.H. (1602 C.E.) while he was fighting the Uzbek army.[136]

The adopting of Shi'a Islam by the Safavid dynasty and the initiations of Iraqi, Lebanese, and Bahraini Shi'a leaders to spread the Twelver Shi'a Islam in Persia explains the rise of the mourning rituals for Al-Hussein in Persia during the sixteenth century. The Persian mourning rituals were certainly influenced by those practiced in Iraq during the ninth century as publicly publically practiced during the Buyid dynasty in Baghdad, as well as near the shrine of Al-Hussein. The publicly held mourning rituals in Iraq helped export these rituals to other Islamic countries through the visitors and preachers who used to attend the holy shrines during the visitation seasons. Such visitations were further encouraged by the Safavid who emphasized the importance of visiting the holy shrines and practicing the mourning rituals.

[135] Ash-Shaibi 415.
[136] Al- Joowayni 48.

Persians contributed a great deal in developing the mourning rituals for the Al-Hussein tragedy, adding much of their cultural heritage to their content, as well as helping in taking these rituals to other countries like Azerbaijan, India, and Turkey.[137] The new additions which the Persians brought to the mourning rituals are practices like *tatbir*, *ta'ziyeh*, the spread of the Imam's pictures, lighting candles in *majlis*, and installing tents for memorial services so mourners could receive the heavenly bliss and have their wishes come true.[138] This act of adding to the rituals shows the tendency of mourners to hope their practices are suitable to their social structure and shows that the living tradition that is consistently reproduced and newly created.

5. The Ottoman Era (1299 C.E.- 1922 C.E.)

Iraq was under the rule of the Ottoman Empire from 1532-1918 C.E. The Ottoman's strictness concerning the practicing of these rituals of the anniversary of Al-Hussein's martyrdom led the Shi'a to practice these rituals secretly in their houses as they used to do during the Umayyad and Abbasid eras. The Turkish governor of Baghdad, Dawood Pasha (1817-1831 C.E.), was the strictest Turkish governor concerning practicing the rituals of *'Ashurā*, and as a consequence Iraqis hosted these events in the basements of their houses, leaving a woman in the front yard of the house to move around a hand mill so its sound covered the sounds of wailing and other activities in the memorial services they held during *'Ashurā*.[139]

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[137] Al- Haydari 61.
[138] Mohsin Al- Dhahiry, "Tareekh Almaetim Al-Husseiniyya fi Alaasr Alqajarey," *Jadal wa Mowaqif fi Alshaair Al-Husseiniyya ,* Ed. Haydar Huballah, Trans. Mushtaq Al- Huloo, (Beirut: Dar Al- Hadi, 2009) 78-79.
[139] Ali Al-Wardi, *Lamahat Ijtimaiyya min Tareekh Al-Iraq Al-Hadith*, (Qom: Intisharat Al- Shareef Al- Radhee, 1971) 110.

Even though this story tells us of a more religious inward group practice than an outward resistance one, it explains the tendency to practice *'Ashurā* rituals even under difficult circumstances. In spite of practicing the rituals in Najaf in 1821 by Sheikh Nasar Al-Absi, which was after the truce between Dawood Pasha and Persia, the prohibition continued in Baghdad until the city was conquered by Ali Riza Pasha who became the new governor. He allowed the practice of *'Ashurā* rituals, because Ali Riza was an adherent of the Bektashi Sufi order which was close in spirit to that of Shi'a. He attended personally one of these *majlis* in Baghdad on the 21st of May 1832 when the memorial services started to be held publically again there.[140] However, these rituals continued to be restricted or prohibited after the era of Ali Riza, according to the policy of the rulers.

In the nineteenth century, the mourning rituals over Al-Hussein witnessed drastic changes because of the newly introduced activities like *tatbir*, striking the chest, as well as using the iron chains by the participants to strike their own backs with them. *Tatbir* was introduced to the mourning rituals held in the Iraqi holy cities of Najaf, Karbala and Al-Kadhumya through the Turkish Shi'a who came to visit these cities; at the beginning this *tatbir* was limited in its practice to non-Iraqis, who came from Turkey and Persia.

The first procession of chest beating (*latm)* appeared in Al-Kadhumya city under the patronage of Sheikh Baqir Asad Allah Al-Daizavoli (d. 1840 C.E.) and then it found its way throughout Iraq.[141] Chest beating is one of the activities that became widespread in Iraq and is still practiced in present time, while lashing the

[140] Al- Wardi 110.
[141] Al- Wardi 150.

back with iron chains (*zangeel)* was introduced by the Indians who settled in Karbala and Al-Kadhumya.[142] However some scholars mention that the use of *zangeel* was actually introduced in 1919 by the British governor of Najaf, who served as governor in Kermanshah, because he wanted to replace the use of swords and *Qama* in *tatbir* with chain-lashing.[143] These new practices developed in Iraq mainly because of the increasing number of Shi'a coming from foreign countries to visit the shrine of Al-Hussein and other holy shrines in Najaf, Al-Kadhumya and Samarra. In addition, some would settle near these cities because of the religious schools that taught Shi'a principles. This exposed these cities to other cultures, and affected the nature and content of the mourning rituals practiced there.

6. The British Mandate and Hashemite Monarchy Era (1920 C.E. - 1958 C.E.)

During the British occupation of Iraq and the Monarchy era, the practice of mourning rituals fluctuated between public freedom at some times and restriction or prohibition at others. Since the beginning of their occupation of Iraq, the British paid attention to these rituals, and this attention continued during the times of King Faisal. At the beginning of his reign, as he supported the processions of *'Ashurā* financially, and attended personally a procession near the shrine of Al-Kadhum in Baghdad in 1921.[144]

However, the Sunni dominance over the government motivated the restriction of practicing the *'Ashurā* rituals, as they became the means of highlighting the

[142] Al- Haydari 460.
[143] Yitzhak Nakash, *The Shiis of Iraq*. (New Jersey: Princeton UP, 1994) 150.
[144] Al- Wardi 6: 128.

grievances of the Shi'a due to the potential of these rituals to be turned into means of protests against the government by the Shi'a leaders.[145] Thus, it became necessary to restrict the practice of these rituals to minimize the role they might play in the politics of Iraq.

The most important feature of this period was the attempt to restrict the role of readers and reciters of *majlis*, who might criticize the government and the social and economic realities of Iraq under the British mandate during their sermons. For example some of the British documents expressed concern over the sermons of Sayid Saleh Al-Halli (d.1940 C.E.) who was one of the most important preachers of *'Ashurā*'s platform. These documents prove that the British were watching him closely to prevent him from criticizing the government in the Al-Umara city, south of Iraq. This explains why the preacher was exiled twice during the 1920s with the accusation of political instigation.[146]

Excluding Shi'a from key governmental positions and jobs in the modern Iraqi state led to many Shi'a complains and increasing tension for the subsequent Sunni governments during the monarchy era.[147] Such grievances led to a violent revolt in 1935 C.E. in the area of the Middle Euphrates and the Muntafeck region in southern Iraq, which prompted the Iraqi government to prohibit memorial

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[145] Nakash 157.
[146] Al- Haydari 7; Nakash 160.
[147] The Shi'a *Ulama* wrote King Faisal confidentially in 1933 "have no connecting with the government and are at present estranged from it, particularly inasmuch as they see the Sunni *Ulama* in possession of funds and properties of which they are deprived, and envy, notable among the religious classes, is something well-known." See: Hanna Batatu, *Shi'ism and Social Protest*. Eds. Juan R.I.Cole and Nikki Keddie. (New Haven: Yale UP, 1986) 198.

services and fundraising for these events as well as imposing central government control on the rituals and their political effects.[148]

The established rituals of *Ashurā* did not provoke controversies the way the new rituals, like *tatbir* and *zanjeel* and the use of using musical instruments like trumpets and drums (which were used widely during the first quarter of the 20th century) did. As these rituals put participants' lives at risk, these rituals also opposed Shi'a Islamic teachings, as well. Some Shi'a scholar (*Ulama*) argued that these rituals were extremely harmful and thus led a reformative campaign against them. Sayid Mohammad Mahdi Al-Quzwini (d. 1939), one of the important Shi'a scholars in Iraq, issued a *fatwa* (religious edict) in 1926, to reform the mourning rituals of Al-Hussein and to exclude the wrong and harmful practices, especially *tashabih* and the prisoners caravan as they exposed Shi'a Islam to much ridicule by others.[149] Coinciding with this tendency, there were other *fatwas* from the Shi'a *Ulama* in Sham (Syria), with Sayid Mohsen Al-Ameen (1866-1951), who forbid some of the new practices which inflict harm on the body like *tatbir*, as well as using the musical instruments, re-enactments, and referring to undocumented *hadiths*.[150] In spite of the fact that these *fatwas* produced many controversies and similar *fatwas* on the same subject, the participants in the rituals were not influenced by these *fatwas* as they always found other clerics who encouraged these practices and their continuity.

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[148] Al- Haydari 73; Nakash 160.
[149] Mohammed Mehdi Al- Qizweeny, "Solat Alhaq aala Jolat Albatil," *Risail Alshair Al-Husseiniya*, Ed. Mohammed Al-Hassoon, (Iran: Muassasat Alrafid, 2011) 180.
[150] Mohsin Al- Ameen, "Altanzeeh Liaamal Alshabeeh," *Risail Alshair Al-Husseiniyya*, Ed. Mohammed Al-Hassoon, (Iran: Muassasat Alrafid, 2011) 167-71.

7. The Republican Era (1958 C.E.- 1968 C.E.)

After the fall of the monarchy and the establishment of the republic of Iraq in 1958, many anti-religious ideas, like communism, were entertained by a wide range of Shi'a youth. The 1940s and 50s witnessed the rise of communism which found a home in the minds of underprivileged classes in Iraq, especially the young Shi'a, as they were trying to find a solution for the problems and social grievances caused by political systems that failed to represent their aspirations or secure the social justice they hoped for. Large numbers of the Iraqi Communist Party were Shi'a, and as the rituals always allowed for huge crowds attending the event, many Communists attended these Shi'a events like *'Ashurā* and *Al-Arb'ain* to publicize their leftist ideologies.[151]

The mourning rituals continued to be held every year by the Shi'a, yet still there were attempts to prohibit them or at least to limit their political influences. Some restrictions were placed on practicing these rituals in some areas in addition to banning the procession of *latm*, or preventing these participants from passing through the center of Baghdad. These were the royal laws of prohibition enacted from 1936 until 1965.[152]

In the later years, these rituals were subject to some extreme security measures enacted by the Iraqi governments, especially when the participants in these rituals were raising slogans asking authorities for social justice, better living

[151] Al- Ameen 161; Elizabeth Warnock Fernea, *Guests of the Sheik*, (New York: Anchor Books, 1965) 218.
[152] Hamid Al- Biyati, *Shi'at Al- Iraq beyna Altaifiya wa Alshubohat fi Alwthaiq Al- Siryyia Al-Britainiya 1963- 196,* (London: Mooassat Alrafid, 1997) 136.

standards, and more freedom.[153] There were no major differences during the 1960s as events continued to accelerate with continuous confrontations between authorities and mourners until the Baath Party overtook power in 1968.

8. The Baath Era (1968 C.E. - 2003 C.E.)

The treatment the Baath showed toward the Shi'a rituals reflects the stand they had toward Shi'a people and their leaders. Since seizing power after the coup of Baath officers in 1968, the party led a campaign against the Iraqi Shi'a leaders and considered them a symbol of "backwardness" and a "great obstacle" to the progress of the Baath agenda.[154] Thus they closed the Kufa theological university confiscating all its assets, and deported almost half a million Iraqi Shi'a with Persian origins; this deportation represented 6% of the Iraqi population at that time.[155] This happened during the *Al-Arb'ain* visitation of April 1969. These measures led to increasing tensions between the Iraqi government and Iran on the one hand, and the government and Iraqi Shi'a on the other. Shi'a leaders under the leadership of Ayatollah Mohsen Al-Hakim was to assert that Shi'a should be allowed to practice their rituals freely in the cities of Iraq, arguing that these were "infidel decisions" from the Baath regime aimed at spreading hatred and dissention between the Iraqi people.[156] These tensions continued between the

[153] Al- Biyati 128-9.
[154] Ali Moaamen, *Sanawat Aljamr,* (Beirut: Almarkaz Al-Islami Alma'sir, 2004) 109.
[155] Moaamen 109-11.
[156] That was majorly the content of Ayatollah Mohsen Al-Hakim's speech in the conference of the 28th of *Safar* in 1969 in Najaf, several days after deporting the Iranian Shi'a. See Ali Moaamen, *Sanawat Aljomar,* 3rd ed., (Beirut: Almarkaz Al-Islami Alma'sir, 2004) 553.

Baath leadership and Shi'a leaders, and developed into a bloody public conflict when the Baath authorities executed five of these leaders in 1974.[157]

This conflict had an effect on the practice of *'Ashurā* rituals during the Baath era. The concluding rituals to the mourning processions in Najaf witnessed violent confrontations between the police and the participants in 1969. Another confrontation happened between participants who were using swords and *Qamas* against security forces in 1975. Prohibition orders were renewed in 1976 and 1977, with the recurrence of confrontations in different Shi'a events resulted in a number of causalities, killed and wounded, in addition to a great number of arrests.[158] The practice of *'Ashurā* and *Al-Arb'ain* rituals continued to face pressures from authorities that were eager to prohibit them; thus practicing the rituals became a kind of confrontation and resistance against the Baath party. Authorities completely banned the practice of the rituals in 1981. Since the Baath regime feared the Iraqi Shi'a would support the Iranian revolution, they banned and controlled the Iraqi Shi'a so that they would not come to support the Iranian revolution.[159]

However, the several wars Iraq suffered during the Baath era and the consequences of its fall, motivated Iraqis to practice these rituals more widely for they had lost their loved ones on a large scale. The six wars Iraq had during and after the fall of the Baath regime included three domestic and three foreign. The first of the six wars was against the Kurds in 1974; the second war was fought

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[157] Marion Farouk Sluglett and Peter Sluglett, *Iraq Since 1958: From Revolution to Dictatorship*, (New York: I. B. Tauris, 2001) 198.
[158] Moaamen 164-5.
[159] Eric Davis, *Memories of State: Politics, History, and Collective Identity in Modern Iraq,* (London: University of California Press, 2005) 192.

against Iran in the 1980s and lasted for 8 years; the third was the invasion of Kuwait in 1990; the fourth one was fought against the Shi'a in 1991 after the rise of 14 out of the 18 total Iraqi governorates; the fifth was the invasion by the U.S. in 2003, and the sixth from 2005-2006, which was a civil war between the Shi'a and Sunni. In the course of just one of these wars, the Iran-Iraq war, there were 100,000 deaths and 300,000 casualties, not to mention the amount of money spent and amount of debt as the result of this war.[160]

These wars mainly affected the Shi'a citizens as they form the majority of the population in Iraq and make up the majority of the soldiers in the formal Iraqi army with the Shi'a in the army comprising at least 80% of the total army forces.[161] These wars contributed to development of a kind of social structure toward practicing the mourning rituals as no Shi'a house is free from the tragedy of losing one of its members because of these wars, thus the surviving individuals helped in developing these mourning rituals. The color black was dominating in streets, schools, and workplace; it was the only color that women dressed, as they ended one mourning, they immediately start another.

Most of the mourning rituals practiced by the Shi'a for their lost beloveds usually entails or includes some rituals for the tragedy of Al-Hussein and his followers. In these rituals practiced for the loss of members of their families, Shi'a would include participate in mourning councils, referring to Karbala and the tragedy of Al-Hussein. If the rituals were for a soldier who died on the battle

[160] Davis 192-3.
[161] Al- Biyati 71, 80.

field, the security forces would not dare to prevent their practice with respect to the "martyr."[162]

Visitation of the holy shrines became increasing more popular during the war years as a growing number of coffins were seen carried on vehicles taking the remnants of soldiers for burial in Najaf (as many Iraqi Shi'a who bury in *Wadi Al-Salam* cemetary, close to Imam Ali's shrine). Most families prayed their Imams to have their beloved sons, husbands, brothers, and fathers who were on the battle field returned.[163] At the same time, different vows were taken to insure the safety of their sons; among the main vows taken were the promises that one would undertake a journey to the holy shrines. A small group of on foot, especially women, did not attract the attention of the security forces then.

Most of the cities inhabited by the Shi'a entered a state of continuous mourning. Their rituals were a mixed expression for the lost beloved as well as the killed Imam, and individuals became accustomed to mourning as part of their daily life. Thus, for about four decades of the Baath regime rule of Iraqi Shi'a, individuals or groups lived in mourning so that it grew to become part of their daily routine. When it was time to mourn Al-Hussein in *'Ashurā* or *Al-Arb'ain*, these individuals and groups practiced rituals that had become so commonplace for them of part of their consciousness they were no longer just a way of expressing an identity, but a way of defining their existence. The mourning rituals practiced by the Iraqi Shi'a grieving over the tragedy of Al-Hussein in *'Ashurā* and *Al-Arb'ain* are integrated in their consciousness, and developed to be closely

[162] The Iraqi government considered those who died on the battle field in its wars a martyr and this title entails great materialistic and moral rights.
[163] Al- Haydari 290.

connected to their current familial mourning, as forced by the recurrent wars Iraqis lived during the last four decades.

E. The Development of Al-Hussein's Shrine Visitation

One of the most important segments practiced in the mourning rituals of *'Ashurā* was the visitation of Al-Hussein's shrine in Karbala. The visitation by the mourners and wailing near his grave were practiced immediately after his martyrdom. Though the group visitation was a ritual started by the *Tawaboon*, four years after the Karbala tragedy, it was not practiced widely because of the attacks visitors feared from Umayyad forces.

The visitation started, however, to be practiced without many restrictions during the Abbasid era, especially during the rules of Al-Mamun, Al-Muaatasem, and Al-Watheq, until Caliph Al-Mutawakel (822-861 C.E.) destroyed the shrine of Al-Hussein in 850 C.E. The historian Ibn Al-Atheer (1160-1233 C.E) mentions that after giving his orders to destroy Al-Hussein's shrine and the houses nearby, Al-Mutawakel also gave orders to damage the entire area, to remove all signs leading to the former shrine and to seed the whole site so that it would become overgrown, and people would not recognize the place anymore. Moreover, he also gave orders to imprison and to inflict the hardest punishment on the observant putting them in a prison called "*Al-Mutbak*" (The Locked).[164]

After the death of Al-Mutawakel, his son, Al-Munatasar, became the Caliph; he allowed people to visit the shrine of Al-Hussein and showed tolerance toward

[164] Ibn Al- Atheer 7: 108.

the Shi'a and Ali's followers, unlike his father who hated Ali and his sons.[165] This proved that Abbasid Caliphs did not totally prohibit the practice of the rituals, but their decision alternated between tolerance and prohibition according to the orientations of the particular caliph.

The rituals of visiting the shrine of Al-Hussein remained in practice on the part of Shi'a, growing and developing gradually under the Abbasid. The visitation of the shrine was not restricted to the actual visitation; it included some other mourning rituals, as well. Among these were wailing and crying, as Shi'a appeared to practice these activities near the shrine of in (908 C.E.).[166]

The prohibition of rituals and the destruction of the shrine by Al-Mutawakel prove that the rituals somehow were practiced on a large scale that drew the attention of the Caliph, provoking his hatred of Ali, his sons and Shi'a. He might have also developed a concern against the growth of Karbala as a spiritual center for Shi'a, which could make the city a threat to the Sunni Abbasid Caliphate in the future. The fear over the possibility of rising power that could rival the Abbasids on the political level had been always the Caliphs' nightmare, and likely it was that fear that led the eighteenth Caliph Al-Muqatader (282-320 A.H., 908-932 C. E.) to destroy the Buratha Mosque which was located on the Al-Kharkh side of Baghdad, as it used to be the place where Shi'a practice their rituals. [167]

The visitation of Al-Hussein's shrine developed especially in the Abbasid Era; this meant that the rituals at that time were of a strong enough structure and base that they were able to grow. The factors that helped in this development were that

[165] Ibn Al- Atheer 6: 449.
[166] Ibn Al- Atheer 6: 449.
[167] Al- Haydari 55.

the shrine of Al-Hussein began to be a place where people from everywhere gathered. In turn, the visitors enhanced economic and demographic factors that created a suitable environment to promote the growth of the shrine to a small village, and later a city.[168] The kind of development which Karbala witnessed because of the visitation ritual made it a city of economic and political significance. This also trigged off the rivalry between Karbala and other Shi'a holy shrines on one side, and with other Islamic cities on the other.

The visitation of the shrine of Al-Hussein developed over time and began to have its own associated rituals. Most of the books of Shi'a explain the details of the visitation, and devoted long chapters on the visitation of this shrine. For example, the books of Sheikh Al-Kulainy (864-941C.E.), especially his book *Kitab Al-Kafi,* one of the fourth important books of *hadith* for Shi'a; also, a complete book for visitations by Jaafar bin Quleweh Al- Qomi (d 978 C.E) one of the famous Shi'a scholars, *Kamil Alziyarat,* and Sheikh Al-Tusi's book (995-1067 C.E.), *Tahtheeb Al-Alahkam*, one of the fourth most important Shi'a books by one of the prominent scholars of the Twelver Shi'a. All this documentation and research made Karbala play the role of a holy city of Shi'a, attracting visitors from every place during fixed times of the year like *'Ashurā* and *Al-Arb'ain*, besides regular visitations throughout the year; this made the city a political and economic rival for the Islamic city of Mecca.

The economic and political significance of the Shi'a holy shrines in Karbala as well as Najaf, where the shrine of Ali is located, are source of rivalry with

[168] Hussain 83.

other Islamic centers as well as making them a target for many of the attacks and raids done by the *Wahhabis* who controlled Mecca, which is the spiritual and economic center of Islam.[169] Mecca was a holy city for many of the pagans, before Islam, because their gods and idols were in that temple. After Islam, Mecca still kept its position as a holy place for Muslims. In both cases, it remained an economic center, which is one of the important positions for holy cities in general. In 1802, Karbala was attacked by *Wahhabis* who aimed at destroying the city, killing everyone there nearby the shrine besides looting all its treasures; in this attack *Wahhabis* burned the shrine of Al-Hussein until it was completely ruined.[170] Such raids were frequent on the Shrine of Ali as well in 1804 and Karbala again in 1807 showing the violent reaction *Wahhabis* had against the rising importance of the Shi'a holy cities, which became a threat to the *Wahhabis* ideologies and the rise of these cities as rivals in politics and economy to the importance of Mecca.

Moreover, the religious conflict cannot account solely for the Shi'a-Sunni opposition; there are also political and economic factors behind this antagonism: on one side there is the rivalry between Sunni and Shi'a holy cities, and among Shi'a cities on the other. The significance gained by the Shi'a holy cities, attracting visitors from around the world especially Persia, made Reza Shah in 1928 forbid his citizens from visiting holy shrines in Iraq, and in addition,

[169] Muslims go to Mecca to perform one of their primary obligations for those who are able to or can afford it, where Shi'a go to Karbala as a blessing and visitation.
[170] Al- Haydari 61.

prohibiting funerals from being carried out in the largest Shi'a cemetery, *Wadi Al-Salam* (Valley of Peace) in Najaf.[171]

To achieve his purpose, Reza Shah went to Qom asking for the Shi'a leaders there to help him in restricting the role of Holy Shrines in Iraq while stressing the importance of the shrines in Persia. Through threats, arrests, and torturing to death two leaders, he managed to secure the issue of a *fatwa* by the rest of the leaders to prohibit the visitation of the holy shrines.[172]

This attempt on the part of Reza Shah aimed at achieving dual goals with political and economic implications. The first, by prohibiting the Persians visitors from entering Iraq, the country would lose significant revenue from these visitations done by the Persians. Such economic loss would be an effective pressure against the Sunni Iraqi government, which was eager to get rid of Persian's dominance over the Iraqi Shi'a; in turn, this increased the tension between Iraq and Persia during the rule of Reza Shah. The second achievement the Shah of Persia wanted was to transform the Persian Shi'a cities in Qom and Mashhad to centers attracting the attention of Shi'a visitors instead of their counterparts in Iraq.

This was not the sole aim of Reza Shah alone, as it reflected to a certain extent the wish of many of Persian Shi'a clerics and people with strong nationalist tendencies to make Persia the center of Shi'a intellectual studies, equal or even better to those institutions in Najaf, Iraq.[173] Such goals led Persians to focus on

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[171] Nakash 170.
[172] Nakash 170.
[173] Roy Mottahedeh, *The Mantle of the Prophet: Religion and Politics in Iran*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1985) 229.

building religious centers competing with those outside Persia. Qom, which contained the shrine of Fatima Al-Maasooma, the daughter of Imam Ali bin Musa Al-Ridha, became one of the most important Shi'a centers in the world, and such became the state of Mashhad which contained the shrine of the eighth of the Twelver Shi'a Imams, Imam Ali bin Musa Al-Ridha (148-203 A.H.-765-818 C.E.) as the Shi'a of Persia started to have their mourning rituals during *'Ashurā* and *Al-Arb'ain* near these two cities instead of following them of Iraq.

F. Conclusion

The historical development of ritual studies practiced in *'Ashurā* and *Al-Arb'ain* by the Shi'a of Iraq went through different stages, starting early in the martyrdom of Al-Hussein and his family in the tragic Battle of Karbala. Many factors contributed the establishment of these rituals and practices, most of them were of ideological, political, economic, social and intellectual nature. These rituals played a major part in the evolvement and development of the Shi'a Islam, which began with a small a group of people supporting Ali bin Abi Talib and his sons. Since their early formulation, these rituals implied defiance and confrontation; thus they became weapons held by Shi'a against their enemies in the frequent conflicts they lived through over the course of fourteen centuries. These rituals also helped to establish cities and important Shi'a centers like the city of Karbala which became a city of spiritual, political and economic powers. Such power made the city of great significance to Shi'a competing with other Islamic powerful cities like Mecca. The practice of mourning rituals in *'Ashurā* and *Al-Arb'ain* reinforces the identity of Shi'a in their societies where they face

increasing conflicts with other Islamic groups. Thus, the rituals contributed to enhancing the Shi'a identity. These rituals provided social and political support as they advanced change in the participants, motivating them to overcome the difficulties and challenges they faced on personal and social levels.

Chapter 3

MOURNING: A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

A. Introduction

This chapter provides an exposition on mourning rituals in relation to Imam Al-Hussein's martyrdom and the impact they leave on individuals' and groups' lives. The importance of mourning lies in its nature as a normal reaction attached to human beings, because it is deeply rooted in them and constitutes a natural component of their psychological structure. Mourning results from sadness triggered by loss, either physical or spiritual, of persons or objects, with which an individual has distinctive attachment. Therefore, loss is the main element that generates mourning and without this loss, mourning would not exist. The process of mourning provides a means to be lessen the impact of loss and its potential dominance. Furthermore, mourning serves as means to adapt to loss and return to the previous normal status prior to loss as individuals and as communities. This return comprises a long complicated process of mourning rituals which would eventually be a positive factor to rid the implications of loss. After mourning, an individual will not return to his ordinary life before the loss. Mourning might also seem connected to psychology and psycho-analysis, and it has its roots in socio-political necessities. In some situations, mourning is an actual product of socio-political circumstances in certain societies.

Practicing mourning rituals of the martyrdom of Imam Al-Hussein is central to the Shi'a Muslims and has played a major role in establishing and crystallizing Shi'a religious beliefs and concepts. Later, it has consolidated their position in

defying and resisting their foes. These rituals have developed, with time, to acquire significances other than the psychological ones, to be practices of ideological, dogmatic and social nature that have played a significant role in producing the Shi'a identity, in general.

B. Mourning: Psychological Perspective

The rituals of mourning and grief have existed since early times, and they result from loss of a close person or any of those whose absence leaves a wide vacuum, either emotional or spiritual, and are practiced in many cases. That is what Sigmund Freud (1856-1939 C.E.) has studied in his work "Mourning and Melancholia," published in 1917. Freud defines mourning as "commonly the reaction to the loss of a beloved person or an abstraction taking the place of the person, such as fatherland, freedom, an ideal and so on."[174]

Loss is usually accompanied by grief the intensity of which depends on the status of the person lost and the psychological preparedness of the grieving person. Because of a loss, whether caused by death or absence, a person would suffer pain triggered by deprivation and longing. This occurs, according to Freud, by pulling away the libido connected to the loved subject which faces resistance in the beginning because the grieving person would not like to let go of the libido even with the presence of an alternative. Therefore, the grieving person would develop a strong urge to abandon reality and hold on to the missed object through a mental hallucinational disorder, which means mourning changed from a normal state to be pathological (melancholic). But mourning plays a decisive role during

[174] Sigmund Freud, *On Murder, Mourning and Melancholia,* Trans. Shaun Whiteside, (London: Penguin Classics, 2000) 203.

this stage in bringing the grieving person back to her or his previous reality, because the ego becomes free and unsuppressed.[175] The process of mourning, according to Freud, can entail a healthy ritual that results from numerous stages of emotional reaction and the purpose of these rituals is in organizing and practicing the stages of mourning.

If the world, according to Freud, becomes "poor and empty"[176], people will seek to satiate this poor condition and fill the emptiness resulting from their loss which has led to this emptiness. The attempt to compensate must eventually be completed, even symbolically. This is the case, because the ultimate goal of the mourning process is to fulfill the necessary stages of the painful reality and to return to reality with less pain depending on the individuals and their circumstances. A person would emancipate himself from suppression and reach the free ego, and distance himself from any factors leading to alienation from reality and the inability to practice daily routines. Otherwise, mental disorder and illness would be inevitable.

Wars provide abundant reasons for mourning by the simple fact that they cause many losses, and those losses lead to mourning. For that reason, mourning rituals are widely practiced during war times. Mourning remains within its social domain during peace time, except in natural disasters. War could possibly be the reason that encouraged Freud to study mourning. After his study *Thoughts for the Times on War and Death*, 1915, Freud presented his research *Mourning and Melancholia* in 1917. Three years into *World War I*, the war had already caused

[175] Freud 204.
[176] Freud 206.

enough deaths and devastation that can lead to particular transformations in mourning and the place of mourning in a society. These practices are the ones that led Freud to reflect on them and write his influential work *Mourning and Melancholia*. That attracted Freud's attention and gave reasons to provide us with an understanding of mourning and its psychological reactions and impacts. Freud followed Karl Abraham (1877-1925), who was one of the first and important German psychoanalysts and also studied Mourning and Melancholia. Freud considered Abraham's work in this subject as a starting point.[177]

If Freud has presented to us a distinguished and early contribution on the analysis of mourning phenomena, his views, in his domain, remained restricted to the structure and concepts of psychoanalysis only. Even though Freud discussed the war, he did not emphasize the social elements of the mourning. We cannot talk about mourning while disregarding other circumstances that envelope mourning. Furthermore, mourning practices differ from one person to another and from one society to another. This has led to more research studies after Freud.

Freud discussed the "economical characterization of pain," which is a part of economy of mourning. He claims that "reality testing has revealed that the beloved object no longer exists, and demands that the libido as a whole sever its bonds with that object."[178] According to Freud's economy of mourning, the mourning ritual of *'Ashurā* would be against this economy of mourning because there is no logical reasoning to mourn someone after so many years. But in the *'Ashurā* case, mourning is not related only to a beloved person, but to an

[177] Freud 204.
[178] Freud 204.

abstraction that takes the place of the person, as Freud mentions in his definition of mourning. Imam Al-Hussein is one of the essential symbols of the Shi'a, and most of them believe that he sacrificed himself to protect them against injustice. Imam Al-Hussein is a very significant symbol for many Shi'a, and they love him as a hero who has spiritual influences.

Erich Lindemann (1900-1974), a psychiatrist who specialized in bereavement, has studied the impact of mourning and grief on socieies in reaction to losses caused by war. He has affirmed that mourning is not a medical or psychological disorder, but a normal reaction to painful situations.[179] Like Freud, Lindemann stresses that mourning might suddenly fully stop social interactions and consequently cause traumatic disorders. The stoppage of social reaction during the mourning process is the most important change because it leads to a stage of isolation from reality and the entry to another world.

John Bowlby (1907-1990), known for his important theory of attachment, has argued that mourning is the manifestation of a psychological development. He explains how the need for attachment starts early in childhood, especially with the mother, which explains the human need for others since birth. Bowlby argues that the loss of a beloved person is the most painful experience for a human being, and that those who suffer loss would be in more pain because of feeling helpless.[180] It is the individual who suffers the loss, reacts to it, and has to overcome the pain. The reaction to loss might basically be individual, because it involves the process

[179] Erich Lindemann, "Symptomatology and Management of Acute Grief," *American Journal of Psychiatry* 101.2 (1944): 141–48.
[180] John Bowlby, *Attachment and Loss, Vol. 3: Loss: Sadness and Depression,* (New York: Basic Books Classics, 1980) 8.

of mourning an individual suffers to pass and overcome the stage of intense pain. In spite of that, loss could have an impact on other individuals in the grieving person's social environment. Responses to loss should occur in one way or another, but differ depending on how close one is to the person lost.

Bowlby claims that people respond to the loss of a beloved person in four stages of mourning: (a) Numbness, (b) Yearning and Searching, (c) Disorganization and Despair, (d) Reorganization.[181] These phases differ in time and the impact on mourners. Psychological preparedness, adaptability and other circumstances, such as means of loss or degree of kinship, decide the responsiveness to mourning. The phase of numbness may last hours to weeks, while yearning and searching may take a few months for some, but years for others.

Therese Rando, a clinical psychologist, thanatologist, and traumatologist who published many works on grief, declares that mourning is not only about expressing reaction to loss, it is also an attempt to adapt to loss by following three important conscious and unconscious operations: (a) break up of psychological and social relation with the person or thing lost, (b) assisting survivors to adapt with loss, and (c) assisting comforters to live soundly.[182] The function of mourning, according to Rando, is not limited to the psychological domain with which Freud deals, but overtakes psychological reactions to adopt new concepts, thoughts, and goals, which eventually will lead to adopting a new world, an after-

[181] Bowlby 85.
[182] Therese A Rando, "Grief and Mourning: Accommodating to Loss," *Dying: Facing the Facts,* Ed. Hannelore Wass and Robert Neimeyer 3rd ed., (Washington DC: Taylor & Francis, 1995) 219-20.

loss world. Moving to a new world does not mean everything is fixed and loss has been overcome and life will be back to usual, as it was before the loss. The most important outcome of the mourning process and its different reactions is the mourner reaches the conclusion that the loss has actually happened and has to live within new psychological and altered circumstances.

Coming to terms with the loss is the most important outcome of mourning, but it could be difficult and complicated if important changes are involved. Vamik Volkan (b. 1932), is a psychiatrist, who built an argument to demonstrate that when change is immense, like war or natural disasters, mourning might not follow the usual path. It rather becomes complicated and might never finish; psychological loss might not become psychological gain.[183] War or disasters yield massive loss which differs from everyday life loss. War causes death to large numbers of people. And loss may mean that people sometimes lose their whole family or a big section of a city may be destroyed. Furthermore, the means of loss is shocking and unusual, especially when bodies are incinerated or deformed or no remains are left of a lost person to identify them. Consequently, mourning takes another path because corpses would not be buried, which in many cultures generates different reactions by mourners. This highly impacts the process and outcomes of mourning.

Mircea Eliade (1907-1986), a philosopher and historian of religion, declares that death would not be actual unless burial ceremonies are complete. The beginning of the body's functional death marks the initiation of a series of rituals

[183] Vamik D. Volkan, "Mourning and Adaptation After a War," *American Journal of Psychotherapy* 31.4 (1977): 567.

that aim at creating a new identity for the deceased.[184] Non-completion of burial ceremonies is considered a complex situation where mourning would diverge from the usual course because the disappearance or lack of a complete burial would potentially lead to state of denial to that loss and adaptation to a new reality. In addition, mourning would not finish when it should; in fact, it may continue for years or forever. This neither means that an individual would mourn all the time, nor that the reality and the impact of loss could not be fully comprehended in early stages, but this means it is the natural process of living with the major loss.[185] In such cases, mourning would not help in shifting from the painful reality of loss to living a new reality adapted with loss, but what usually occurs is a repetition of mourning stages without shifting to a new reality. The reason is that mourners would not be certain of losing an individual, and the loss might not have actually been recognized. Consequently, there would be no motive for mourners to adopt new psychological and social variables compared with a usual case of loss. This makes mourning rituals continuous as if they have no foreseeable end.

C. Mourning: Anthropological and Sociological Perspectives

Emile Durkheim (1858-1917) builds an argument to claim that mourning is not an expression of an individual's case, but it is a response to traditions imposed by society. Thus mourning is not a natural motion of personal feeling toward the extreme missing or loss of someone, but it is a duty imposed by a group. Someone

[184] Mircea Eliade, "Mythologies of Death: An Introduction," Religious *Encounters with Death: Insights from the History and Anthropology of Religions* Eds. Frank E. Reynolds and Earle H. Waugh, (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1977) 15.
[185] Therese A. Rando, "Mourning," *Macmillan Encyclopedia of Death and Dying* Ed. Robert Kastenbaum (New York: Macmillan, 2002) 594.

does not cry because they are sad, but because they have to cry; it is the stand of rituals to adopt to the choice of customs which are largely independent from personal feelings.[186] Durkheim has always tried to attribute the essential importance of the force to a social factor, not to the individual one. The theme of society, for Durkheim, is central to all aspects of the world, for example, religion is "social" or "something collective" and society is able to answer variant important questions in our world.[187]

Mourning, according to Durkheim, is one ritual out of many others that aims at vitalizing the society. This is especially in the case of mourning, where loss of a group member becomes an influential issue that contributes to bringing individuals together. It strengthens their relations and connects them in an emotional and thoughtful phase, which assists in liberating their feelings and achieving a kind of compensation and reward for the person they lost.[188] According to this view, the factor that triggers mourning is social more than psychological. Collective mourning rituals become a source of strength for the group, because they provide the strength and cohesion of the group in the face of challenges: loss of a member in this case. Emotional communication is vital for rebuilding of society, and expresses, at the same time, that the individual is no more than a member of society that shares in mourning to overcome loss.

Clifford Geertz (1926-2006), an anthropologist, searches suffering to emphasize how people cope and live with it, and consequently making the pain

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[186] Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, Trans. Joseph Ward Swain, (New York: Collier, 1961) 442-43.
[187] Durkheim 63, 471.
[188] Durkheim 447.

and suffering of the loss bearable.[189] Though Geertz's view seems as if it is centered on dealing with suffering as a "religious problem," it provides us with good thoughts on how to handle pain, loss, and defeat in life too. Consequently, mourning could result from losing values and thoughts, as well. Suffering, pain, loss and defeat, mentioned by Geertz are faced by humanity in different stages of development, and have not silenced them. While puzzled by death, people have continued to wrestle it out of their usual world. That is why people have paid great attention to explaining death and severe sadness. Religions have provided in early stages answers through symbols of death rituals to reach an experience that could help us understand and explain mourning. Geertz does not mention specific ideas about mourning, but about the suffering and pain that it face and how to deal with it to make it more acceptable. Therefore his ideas are also relevant to support the idea of mourning and how it is dealt with by people.

Van Gennep (1873-1957), an ethnographer and folklorist, has offered an important contribution in his theory on rites of passage, in which he studies shifting from one life phase to another through three phases: separation, transitional and incorporation. He mentions, "I propose to call the rites of separation from a previous world *preliminal rite*, those executed during the transitional stage liminal (or threshold) rites, and the ceremonies of incorporation into the new world post-liminal rites."[190] Gennep has tried to confirm that these rites are crucial and well established in the society structure. That is why he has

[189] Clifford Geertz*, The Interpretation of Cultures,* (New York: Basic Inc, 1973) 104.
[190] Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage,* Trans. Monika B. Vizedom and Gabrielle L. Caffee, (Chicago: Chicago UP 1960) 21.

studied the changes that occur to an individual's social state, in occasions of birth, childhood, maturity, marriage, death, and other rites of passage.

Gennep claims that rites of funeral help in uniting with the other world and organizing the process of mourning for the survivors. Mourning is a transitional phase for the survivors where they enter it through separation rites and emerge through reintegration in a form of society.[191] The function of mourning, for Gennep, is incorporation and reintegration of society which occurs through practices of mourning rituals. Physical participation in rituals of burials and the stoppage of usual social life during the mourning times state that society is affected by life and death equally. These rites are an attempt at maintaining identity against the dangers of resulting changes, which contributes eventually to forming and supporting the collective identity of participants in mourning rituals.

Victor Turner (1920-1983) is an anthropologist was well known for his contribution with symbol, ritual, and rites of passage. After Gennep, he presents us with a three phases passage: (a) separation of participant from the usual role in their social structure, (b) marginalization; a transitional stage where participants' social status would be ambiguous and perplexing, (c) aggregation; where participants would return with a new identity.[192] This sample enables us to study the rituals in an acceptable way, especially when most rituals go through these three stages of transition in a way or another. Mourning rituals are a kind of passage ritual from one stage to another and leaves an impact and considerable effect on participants as individuals or groups.

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[191] Gennep 147.
[192] Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure,* (New York: Gruyter Inc, 1969) 94-95.

Turner presents rituals as a process of entering and leaving time and social structure; therefore, it helps in changing the social status of its participants. The same could be said about practicing mourning rituals, because they help the mourner to run through the various stages that lead to separation from reality then entering a series of psychological and social processes, before reaching the stage of reorganizing in order to adapt with new reality and free the person from hurdles that had curbed it. Rituals, in general, provide a new social situation for its participants to integrate with the new reality, as is the case with mourning rituals.

Turner's idea on the rite of passage is a good entry point for the study of rituals that especially make a transition in the state of the participant in general, and *'Ashurā* rituals practiced by the Iraqi Shi'a in particular. Turner's passage phases provide appropriate models to study *'Ashurā* rituals in order to analyze and know significant dimensions of these rituals.

Memory is an important factor required by collective mourning rituals, for it is one of the influencing factors of the social construction of any community. Maurice Halbwachs (1877-1945), a philosopher and sociologist, demonstrates that memory, even on an individual level, is not related only to an individual, but also belongs to a social system due to its interaction with social environment in society, people get their memories in a normal way and they can remember, differentiate and specify their memories.[193] Although, memory is centered in the individual and they perform the remembering, the group the individual belongs to restructures and forms this memory anew. The groups also encourage the

[193] Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory,* Trans. Lewis A. Coser, (Chicago: Chicago UP, 1992) 83.

individual to remember and forget certain things, consequently, its collective memory plays a pivotal role in structuring and forming the identity of societies through collective remembering, which most of the time focuses on joint links amongst the group itself. Practicing mourning rituals could be a factor that validates collective memory because they include active symbols able to pass through the collective memory and the social statuses of practitioners.

D. Mourning in Sunni Islam

Mourning in Islam as well as other practices, follows traditional customs that come from the Quran, *hadith*, and religious scholars. But sometimes, mourning is affected by the social, cultural and ideological backgrounds. In this section, I will focus mainly on mourning in Sunni Islam, according to the Quran, *hadith*, and significant religious scholars' thoughts.

Al-Ghazali (1058-1111C.E) was a Persian Muslim theologian, jurist, philosopher, and is one of the prominent Sunni Muslim scholars who researches death and mourning. He has a very significant notion of living in the presence of death, and why we have to remember the dead. To live a more ethical life aware of the presence of death allows one to be a better person or member of the community and a more pious Muslim. He authored a whole book on that and titled it *The Remembrance of Death and the Afterlife* (*Thekir Al-Mwat wama baadah*).

Al-Ghazali builds an argument to demonstrate that death is a change in status of human beings and it is traveling or having a head start before others to a final homeland. Because of this, humans should not grieve for the loss of their loved

ones because they will catch up with them soon, and that participation in funerals and consolation ceremonies should focus on pondering death itself and preparing oneself to talk humbly in front of it.[194] Mourning rituals in Islam focus directly on the idea that grief over a loved one should be short, and last in cases no more than the three days spent by comforters on praying, asking for mercy for the soul of the lost person, and without weeping or showing intense grief. Mourning in Islam seems to create a situation that supports the social structure of the Islamic community (*Ummah*) through the participation of Muslims as one community in mourning rituals, cortege, prayers and burial.

Wives and husbands, in Islam, mourn differently. While the Quran does not specify the rituals of mourning for men, it mentions specific mourning rituals for women. A wife should mourn for four months and ten days as stated in the Quran "If any of you die and leave widows behind, they shall wait concerning themselves four months and ten days: when they have fulfilled their term, there is no blame on you if they dispose of themselves in a just and reasonable manner. And Allah is well acquainted with what you do."[195] But a pregnant woman who loses a husband should remain in mourning till giving birth "and for those who have no courses (it is the same): for those who carry (life within their wombs), their period is until they deliver their burdens."[196] Additionally, the Quran does not require a woman to mourn for anyone more than three days except for her husband. The Prophet Mohammed said, "It is not permissible for a woman who

[194] Al-Ghazali, "The Remembrance of Death and the Afterlife," *The Revival of the Religious Sciences*, Trans. T.J. Winter, (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1989) 99,109,122.
[195] The Holy Quran. Trans. Abdullah Yusef Ali. (New York: Tahrike, 2009) 2:234.
[196] The Holy Quran 65:4.

believes in Allah and the latter day to mourn a dead person more than three days, but four months and ten days over her husband."[197] Islamic teachings prohibit excessive mourning and forbid some types of mourning rituals that were followed in pre-Islamic times like "cheek bashing and clothes tearing."[198] Neither the state nor their religious authorities find it acceptable for men or women to engage in such practices.

When women are in mourning situations, they should avoid wearing make-up, jewelry, fragrances, and whatever might attract others to her. She also cannot remarry, in addition to staying in her late husband's home for the four months and ten days of the mourning period, leaving it only when necessary. Imam Malik (711-795 C.E.) is one of the most important Sunni scholars in jurisprudence (*fiqh*) and *hadith* (prophetic sayings). He was born and died in Medina. He is the founder of the *Maliki* denomination– one of the four Muslim Sunni Denominations. In his famous book, *Al- Muwatta*, a collection of Prophetic sayings *hadith,* in the chapter on divorce, relates many sayings regarding the mourning prohibitions on women from using make-up like Kohl, perfumes, jewelry, and some types of clothes and limiting that to rough black clothes.[199]

Visiting graves is a common practice for Muslims, especially Mohammed's and his good followers' graves.[200] Mohammed prohibited visiting graves in the beginning then allowed it. For example, Ahmed bin Hanbel (780-855 C.E.), one

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[197] Mohammed bin Ismail Al-Bukhari, *Sahih Al- Bukhari,* Vol. 2, (Bulaq: Al Madhba'a Al Kubra Al Ameeriya, 1894) 78.
[198] Al-Bukhari 81.
[199] Malik bin Anas, *Al-Muwatta,* Ed. Mohmmed Fouad Abdulbaqi, (Beirut: Dar Ihya Al- Turath Al- Arabi, 1985) 599.
[200] Later on the *Wahhabis* raised them to the ground several times in Saudi Arabia and Iraq.

of the four important Sunni scholars in Islamic jurisprudence, was born in Basra and died in Baghdad and is the founder of the *Hanbeli* denomination in the Islamic Sunni School. He relates in his collection of *hadith* that are called *Al-Musnad* that Ali bin Abi Talib heard Mohammed saying, "Earlier, I prohibited you from visiting graves, visit them to learn lessons."[201] Mohammed left many sayings encouraging Muslims to visit graves, especially the prophet's grave and his good followers for remembering, blessings and lessons.[202] Visiting graves and obtaining the intercession of the righteous buried in them play an influential role in practicing mourning for Muslims in general, as one of the *hadiths* related to the Prophet Mohammed who said, "He who visits my grave shall win my intercession."[203]

Wahhabism, derived from its founder's name Mohammed Bin Abdil Wahhab (1703- 1787 C.E.), emerged in the Arabian Peninsula and rejects most mourning rituals classifying them as non Islamic practices. Mohammed bin Abdil Wahhab convinced the tribal leader Mohammed bin Saud to follow the *Wahhabi* doctrine, and he became one of its main supporters. Bin Saud took the responsibility of spreading the *Wahhabi* call in the Nejd area in middle of the Arabian Peninsula, through his raids on other Arabic tribes in what is currently Saudi Arabia. Wahhabism is known for the adoption of *Salafist* methodology and called for the getting ride of all habits and practices they think are against Islamic principles. That's why *Wahhabis* consider praying to the Prophet and the Prophet's family

[201] Ahmad bin Hanbal, *Musnad Ahmad ben Hanbal,* Ed. Mohammed Abdulqader Aata, Vol. 9, (Beirut: Dar Alkutub Alaalmiya, 2008) 421.
[202] Al- Ghazali 111-12.
[203] Ali bin Omar Al- Darqutni, *Sunan Al- Darqutni,* Eds. Adil Ahmed Abdulmawjood and Ali Mohammed Muaawad. Vol. 2, (Beirut: Dar Al-Maarifa, 2001) 531.

and asking for blessing at their graves is forbidden (*haram*). The practices of mourning rituals were prohibited because they fell into the category of heresies that make their participants go astray and turn into infidel.[204] Because of this, *Wahhabis*, after controlling Mecca and Medina, destroyed and ruined most of the shrines linked to Muslims' *Hajj*.[205]

What mostly distinguishes mourning rituals in Sunni Islam is the attempt to direct them completely to consolidate the religion's structural concepts that relate to the Quran and *hadith*. They encourage people to conform to these concepts, especially these related to faith, piety and austerity. Death in Islam is the move into another world the change of the deceased's state "transformed" that enables him to reach his new world. Therefore, mourners do not have to show grave sorrow when this transformation and change happens. The focus of mourning rituals is on the further end of the journey of the deceased who will be rid of the burdens of further tests in his life and who is going to live immortally in his or her after life. That is why comforters hope to participate in easing the traveler's journey to his new homeland by praying and asking for forgiveness for him and by reciting Quran.

E. Mourning in Shi'a Islam

There seemed to be no serious difference in the mourning practices of Sunni or Shi'a Muslims before Al-Hussein's martyrdom in the Karbala battle (680 C.E.). But differences started to manifest gradually after the catastrophic battle of

[204] Daniel Bates and Amal Rassam, *Peoples and Cultures of the Middle East*, (Prentice-Hall, Inc.: Englewood Cliffs, 1983) 76.
[205] Arthur Goldschmidt Jr., *A Concise History of the Middle East*, (Westview Press, Inc.: Boulder, 1996) 214-15.

Karbala. It is related that Imam Jaafar Al-Sadiq (702–765 C.E.) said, "Crying and intense distress is disapproved for a worshipper unless it is for Al-Hussein bin Ali (peace be upon them), then it is rewarded."[206] This saying and others are related from Jaafar Al- Sadiq (702-765 C.E.), the sixth Imam for Twelver and Ismailite Shi'a and the founder of the *Jaafari* theology school who born and died in Medina. He treated the treated the mourning rituals over Al-Hussein as an exceptional case, different from other rituals of mourning. While mourning rituals in Islam are restricted generally and weeping and intense distress are disapproved, and Muslims are discouraged from practicing them, the case is different with Al-Hussein in showing the sign of mourning. People are rewarded for that. Related sayings of Shi'a Imams urge Shi'a to perform mourning rituals in different times during the year and not only during *'Ashurā.* Additionally poets and elegy writers have composed works to actuate listeners' sadness, and encourage families' participation in mourning rituals.[207] Manifestations of grieving over the martyrdom of Imam Al-Hussein have been passionate practices to political conflict, but it has become a practice that relies on the religious foundation that includes these rituals as an essential active element in consolidating its structure.

Poetry is an important means of expression in mourning rituals in general and in Shi'a mourning rituals specifically. Poetry plays an influential role in the expression of the feelings of sadness that are difficult to express in other ways. Poetry also acts as a recording of those special moments or feelings. The poetry becomes like taking a clear picture of the feelings of mourning, but it is not a

[206] Jaafar bin Quluweh Al- Qomi, *Kamil Alziyara* (Beirut: Muassasat Al Fikr Al-Islami, 2012) 123.
[207] Al-Qomi 209, 210, 218.

photograph as much as a picture drawn by words expressing those feelings. William Watkin, a professor of Contemporary Literature and Philosophy at Brunel University-London, builds an argument that claims:

> "The very essence of poetry, and of poetics, is this wanting to say the unsayable. The poem is made up of what is left over after all other discursive practices have satisfied their own requirements and moved on to the next problem. If language did not exist in this way, then there would be no presence and therefore we would all have nothing to lose. To speak is to fail to say. Poetry is what is made up from exactly this failure. This is why poetry and loss are still so important for us. Language is marked by a sense of loss, by what it tried but could not say. At the moment when this is realized and accepted, the poem is born."[208]

Watkin gives us an important answer regarding the secret link between loss and poetry. This link has not been affected by various changes and transformation of mourning rituals and its manifest icons. A poem, since the first epic, Gilgamesh, until now is an existing means of expression that is tightly linked with feelings of loss and expresses it magnificently and accurately.

Language in daily life appears unable to express or describe deep feelings because it is generic conversational and lacking in creativity. Contrary to this, poetry is specific and able to penetrate into the depth of human feelings; thus, it enjoys higher qualities for communicating and describing feelings that daily

[208] William Watkin, *On Mourning: Theories of Loss in Modern Literature,* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2004) 13.

language would fail to express. The highly poetic spirit of a poet, is a tool to overcome loss and eventually express that emotion in poetry, and renders poetry as a suitable means for expressing loss. Therefore, poetry and loss have been strongly linked such that both are still tightly connected until nowadays. This explains the historic link between poetry and mourning rituals in the commemoration of Imam Al-Hussein since from the beginning poetry has been an essential pillar of these rituals.

F. Literature Review

The main source books of history and of the death of Al-Hussein are the references that provide historic information on the Karbala battle and what happened to Al-Hussein and his companions and the events after his martyrdom. Some of these books, *Maqtal Al-Hussein* (Death of Al- Hussein) by Abu Makhnuf (d. 773-74 C.E.), *Tareekh Al- Tabari: Tareekh Alrasool Wa Almalook* (The History of Prophets and Kings) by Ibn Jareer Al-Tabari (838-923 C.E.), *Tareekh Al-Yaaqubi* (History of Al-Yaaqubi*)* by Ahmad bin Abi Yaaqub Al- Yaaqubi (d. 897-98 C.E.), *Alkamil Fi Altareekh* (The Complete in History) by Ibn Al-Atheer (1160-1233 C.E.), and *Almalhoof Ala Katla Al-Tofoof* (Yearning to the Martyrs of Karbala) by Ibn Tawoos (1193-1246 C.E.).

These books have become essential references relied on in *Majilis Al-'Aza*. They are used mainly as ongoing references to narrate Al-Hussein's, his family's and companions' stories. These books have played an important historical role in keeping Al-Hussein's story alive in the memory and consciousness of Shi'a

Muslims.[209] The story is reread annually from these books, especially Abu Makhnuff and Ibn Tawoos' books. They not only talk about historic events but also emphasize on projecting the emotional aspect of the Karbala battle. The reaction of listeners and readers is emotionally strong and effective. The recitations of Al-Hussein's story every year, based on these books for many centuries, have made these books the most important history references on Al-Hussein's death and are most accepted by Shi'a, especially with many indications that confirm that the Umayyad, after Al-Hussein's death, sought to ban and destroy all writings or narratives of the Karbala battle. That was an attempt to reduce the negative impact and Muslims' anger after the murder of the Prophet's grandson. These surviving references rendered the Umayyad's effort useless and Al-Hussein's death story is read in annual mourning rituals at homes and nowadays it is reread from the same books mentioned here either in Iraq or other Shi'a places all over the world.

Gary Ebersole, a professor in religion, who specializes in the comparative-historical study of religion, demonstrates that weeping rituals as practiced by the Shi'a in *Muharram* to commemorate Al-Hussein and his family are a clear example of collective expression of recreating a collective identity for a minority within a massive religious tradition.[210] Activities practiced by the Shi'a like mourning, weeping, elegies, and others are essential pillars of developing the Shi'a Islam, and creating a distinctive socio-cultural identity. The Shi'a mourning

[209] Not all these books are written by Shi'a scholars, but are also by Sunni such as Al-Tabari and Ibn Al-Atheer.
[210] Gary L. Ebersole, "The Function of Ritual Weeping Revisited: Affective Expression and Moral Discourse," *Religion and Emotion: Approaches and Interpretation,* Ed. John Corrigan, (New York: Oxford UP, 2004) 212.

rituals have not been religious social rituals isolated from various circumstances and challenges faced by the Shi'a society. These rituals, being deeply rooted in popular Shi'a passions and collective memory, are able to absorb the political and historical changes the Shi'a have faced. These rituals play a major role in presenting and crystallizing Shi'a identity throughout history and an effective tool to tackle the challenges faced by structural religious establishment.

Ebersole takes lamenting as an element of emotion clearly apparent in some rituals like Shi'a mourning rituals over Al-Hussein. Tears resulting from lamenting is nothing but "ethical economy" able to bring about change to minorities' lives. Crying, according to Ebersole, is not an emotion but also means to attain other end and goals. Crying for Shi'a is one of the practices most Shi'a books encourage Shi'a to do. This could be seen in Shi'a mourning rituals where crying is an element in an implied address to bring about change in status of social, politics, religion, and purification. That's why tears in *'Ashurā* rituals help Shi'a build a special social synthesis different from the social framework of others in Iraqi society.

Heinz Halm (1942-), who is a professor of Islamic history, claims that collective sadness and weeping practiced by the early 685 C.E. Shi'a *Tawaboon* (Penitents) are not to express sadness over Al-Hussein's death, but basically over themselves for what sins they have committed.[211] This early collective practice seems, to Halm, the crucial root of the complex combination of mourning rituals, atonement and asking forgiveness for committing the sin of dereliction of

[211] Heinz Halm, *Shia Islam: From Religion to Revolution,* (Princeton: Weiner Publishers, 1999) 41.

assisting Al-Hussein in *'Ashurā.* Halm considers that a historical introduction to consolidate annual *'Ashurā* rituals. Halm's view confirms, in a way or another, that one function of *'Ashurā* rituals, other mourning over Al-Hussein, are purification rituals that aim at changing the psychological state of the participants and getting rid of guilty feelings towards their beloved lost person.

Halm's idea gives us an aspect of the functions of Shi'a mourning rituals in their early beginnings, though it is limited. The feeling of guilt of the *Tawaboon* has become a motif for them to practice such a ritual, it is not certainly the essential motif for them. What made the *Tawaboon* practice lamenting at Al-Husein's grave is a motif of two edges basically. First, it is dogmatic loyalty to Al-Hussein being the most prominent symbol for them at the time because he is the prophets' grandson and their leader's son, Imam Ali. The *Tawaboon* consider Ali as the Muslims' caliph and as a distinctive religious personality as well. Second, it was a political motif the *Tawaboon* have to demand revenge for Al-Hussein's blood because he was killed according to orders from the caliph Yazid. Most of the *Tawaboon* were *Mawali* (non-Arab Muslims) who belonged to a lower social class than the Arab Muslims.[212] Amongst them were a large number of non-Arab Muslims who were taken as inferior in the Arabic community in Kufa. The *Tawaboon* in Kufa lost hope after Al-Hussein's martyrdom of having another leader as important as Al-Hussein who was revered and respected by Arabs. Consequently, their hopes of change and social reform and improving their status went with the wind after Al-Hussein's martyrdom. Therefore, the crucial

[212] Mohammed Mehdi Shamsaldeen, *Ansar Al- Hussein*. 3rd ed. (Beirut: Almuassassa Alduweliya Lildirasat wa Alnashir, 1996) 94.

motif for them to have mourning rituals over Al-Hussein cannot be the outcome of their endeavor to attain atonement of their guilt for not advocating for Al-Hussein. It was as Halm claimed, the *Tawaboon* would have found it sufficient to practice mourning and lamenting on Al-Hussein's grave in order to atone for their feelings of guilt. They could have done that after his death but instead they waited until 685 C.E. (after 4 years to Al-Hussein's martyrdom). The *Tawaboon* rebelled against the authority of the Umayyad caliphate using Al-Hussein as a pretext that could provide them with a legitimate cover for their demands.

Yitzhak Nakash, an associate professor of Middle Eastern and Islamic studies at Brandeis University, in his work *The Shi'is of Iraq* 1994, studied the Iraqi Shi'a since the mid-eighteenth century until the falling of the Iraqi Monarchy in 1958. Nakash builds an argument to claim that the cultural and ethical values of Iraqi and Iranian Shi'a community have been deeply rooted in their religious rituals and practices.[213] Even though the relation between Iraqi and Iranian Shi'a has been close and integrated in so many aspects, their background distinguishes both of them even in *'Ashurā* rituals. Therefore one could find the individuality of each community expressed in their different mourning rituals for Imam Al-Hussein.

Nakash argues that, the Iraqi Shi'a have become Shi'a in a modern era, and that Shi'a was a result of a development of an event that occurred during nineteenth century when most nomadic Iraqi tribes settled and took to agriculture.[214] Although Nakash mentions a wide wave of Shi'a in Iraq began with the rise of Karbala and Najaf as the most important religious centers in the

[213] Yitzhak Nakash, *The Shiis of Iraq,* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1994) 6.
[214] Nakash 4.

mid-eighteenth century[215], but he does not give a clear perspective on Shi'a status before that date. He does not tell us whether Shi'a were a minority or majority in Iraq before that time. Nakash emphasized the migration of many Arabic Sunni tribes from the Arabian Peninsula to settle in Iraq in that time. They converted to Shi'a rapidly at the end of the eighteenth century and through to the nineteenth century. He presented Iraq before the mid-eighteenth century as if it was not inhabited by Arabic Shi'a tribes and that Shi'a before that date were not of any importance in Iraq, while Najaf and Karbala have been the main center of Shi'a due to their sacred status for Shi'a, and Najaf is the ground for the shrine of the Shi'a first Imam Ali and the most prominent religious school. This school later on moved from a previous site in Baghdad to Najaf due to a gory conflict between Sunni Saljoukid and Shi'a Buyid in Baghdad.[216]

After Saljoukid *Al-Salajeka* controlled Baghdad in 1055 C.E., the Shi'a were targeted and amongst them were the Shi'a Sheikh, Al- Tusi, whose house was ransacked and his books burnt. Afterwards, he moved to Najaf in 1057 C.E.- 449 A.H., where he was followed by his students and a number of Shi'a.[217] As for Karbala, it became a distinguished city that expanded with time because it was a place to visit the sacred shrines and it provided economic opportunities to its inhabitants who serviced visitors of Al-Hussein's shrine. Consequently, Najaf and Karbala have played spiritual, ideological roles since almost the eleventh century.

[215] Nakash 3.
[216] Ali bin Mohammed Ibn Al-Atheer, *Alkamil Fi Altareekh*, Ed. Abi Alfada Abdullah Alkadi, Vol. 8, (Beirut: Dar Alkutub Alaalmiya, 1987) 446.
[217] Ibn Al-Atheer 448.

Shi'a and their rituals have never been missing in Iraq, and even in rough times they secretly practiced their rituals away from their foes' surveillance.

Yitzhak Nakash builds an argument to claim that:

> "There exists at the core of Shi'ism in Iraq a society whose strong Arab tribal value system was encapsulated by Shi'i religion, not permeated by it [and]…the Iraqi Shi'is on the whole have been distinguished by their Arab tribal attributes and moral values, which were evident in their rituals and endured long after the establishment of modern Iraq."[218]

The Arabic tribal values apparent in Iraqi mourning rituals can be traced back to the tribal background of Iraqi Shi'a who have resided in Iraq for a long time especially after building the two cities of Kufa (622 C.E.) and Basra (636 C.E.). Imam Ali took Kufa as his caliphate capital in 656 C.E., and many Yemenite tribes moved with him to it. Accordingly, the Arabic background of Iraqi tribes can be established before the late migration to Iraq in about the eighteenth century which Nakash mentions as so influential on the Arabic tribal background of Iraqi Shi'a. Thus, the Arabic tribes in Iraq were powerful for many centuries before the time mentioned by Nakash.

The tribal Arabic values of the Iraqi Shi'a community play an essential role for the participants in mourning rituals. The activity of *hosa* in which poems are read and dances are performed in Iraq is not known at all to the Persian Shi'a, because it is part of the Arabic values that shape the Iraqi Shi'a mood and

[218] Nakash 6-7.

expresses its Arabic tribal values.[219] On the other hand, the Persian mourning theater (*Ta'ziyeh*) which was established and highly developed during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries reflects an important aspect of the structure and mood of the Persian personality and its interaction with this art. It is believed that *Ta'ziyeh* in Persia developed from Zoroastrians practice in commemoration of Siyavush. The Zoroastrian myth claims that Siyavush sacrificed himself to generate life. So that, many Zoroastrians went to the same place that he was killed and weep.[220]

The successive governments and upper class in Iran have supported this theater activity, while in Iraq; it has been limited to expressive means and improvised scenes most of the time. Mourning rituals that are practiced, though similar in most of the Shi'a communities, reflect cultural social folklore aspects of each of these communities.

Ali Al- Wardi (1913-1995), is one of the main pioneers of Iraqi sociology. In his book *Lamahat Ijtimaiyya min Tareekh Al-Iraq Al-Hadith* (1971), he focused on the nature of the emergence and structure of modern Iraqi society since the Ottoman era until the end of the twentieth century. Al- Wardi builds an argument to demonstrate that the beating celebration (*Majalis Al-Latm)* and the processions of Al-Hussein (*Al-Mawakib Al-Husseinyya)* in Iraq during the nineteenth century onward appeared for the first time in Al- Kadhumya city and were organized by

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[219] See Robert A. Fernea, *Shaykh and Effendi: Changing Patterns of Authority Among the El Shaban of Southern Iraq* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1970) 87, 92, 113.
[220] Ehsan Yarshater, "Ta'ziyeh and Pre-Islamic Mourning Rites in Iran," *Ta'ziyeh, Ritual and Drama in Iran, Ed.* Peter J. Chelkowski, (New York: New York UP and Soroush Press, 1979) 91-92.

Sheikh Baqir Asadullah Al-Dizafooly (d. 1840). They spread all around Iraq because they have been taken as a sign of high social status. Any person with some wealth could have been inclined to organize a *majlis* in his house to raise his social standing. These processions and *majalis* have a symbol of high status "a man, who resides a procession or walks in front of it or lament in it, feels some sort of highness and elevation due to masses surrounding him."[221] The function of mourning rituals has not been limited to political emotional aspects only but also become socio-political "symbols" in a society where some members seek the means of changing their status to a socially distinctive one. These changes in understanding mourning rituals have proven the strength and influence of these rituals and their deep roots in the Shi'a compassion, in addition to their ability to develop and increase their participants. Mourning rituals over Al-Hussein's death contribute, just like other mourning rituals, to bringing change to the social status of their participants, which revitalizes the new reality of the rituals' participants.

Ali Al-Wardi studied mourning rituals practiced by Shi'a in Baghdad in the mid-nineteenth century from the psychological and sociological perspectives. He focused on prominent social changes that the Iraqi society was subjected to due to urban transformation and the conflict between Bedouin values and the requirements of new shifts toward urbanism. Though he did not elaborate on mourning rituals widely, he emphasized an aspect of these rituals as being part of the sociological background of Iraqi individuals. These individuals have sought to pursue urban development from one side, and stick to their cultural values and

[221]Ali Al-Wardi, *Lamahat Ijtimaiyya min Tareekh Al-Iraq Al-Hadith,* Vol. 2, (Qom: Intisharat Al-Shareef Al- Radhee, 1971) 111.

background on the other. Al-Wardi in his argument tries to study mourning rituals, especially *Majilis Al-'Aza*, as ones that help participants bring obvious change to their social status. Practicing these rituals also help the participants reveal some of their past values and traits which witnessed a conflict between the past and present. Thus, these rituals provide the opportunity for their participants to symbolically move between two past social backgrounds and their wish to pursue new changes in their lives.

Although Robert Fernea's *Shaykh and Effendi* (1970) is a field study in the south of Iraq between 1956-1958 on relation between irrigation and politics power, he presents to us important aspects that could help us develop awareness of differences of mourning rituals between small cities' inhabitants and the Arabic tribes who lived on the outskirts. Some of these differences, mentioned by Fernea, are related to *'Ashurā* rituals.

Mourning rituals of the martyrdom of Imam Al-Hussein have been in practice for centuries in a way consistent with Iraqi culture and its tribal identity. The rituals usually include weeping, reciting elegies, reciting the story of Al-Hussein's death and beating the chest (*latm*). The *bedouin* Arabic background, known for strength and courage in hard times, plays an important role in shaping these rituals and how to practice them. It is so difficult for an Arab to practice self-flagellation and beating on his chest because they contradict social and psychological structure of his character. This point is clearer in the Iraqis' stand regarding head laceration *tatbir*, back lashing *zangeel*, and chest beating *latm*, which have been practiced in the sacred shrines and was only practiced by non-Arabs in the

beginning of these rituals. Robert Fernea gives an account of *'Ashurā* mourning rituals in Daghara village, 13 km from Diwaniyah, in the south of Iraq in the late 1950s. He mentions that tribal men in this village do not participate in the mourning procession *mawakib* in their village or even the ones sent to Karbala because they are inconsistent with their tribal ethical values.[222] Therefore, *tatbir* and *zangeel* have remained widely unpopular amongst Arab Shi'a, and are limited to Persian, Turk and Indian Shi'a. These practices have been condemned by Shi'a scholars and triggered a wide debate between supports and opponents. Still, the issue has not been settled until now.

Ibrahim Al-Haydari, (1936-), an ethnographical scholar, in his social anthropology study *Trajidiya Karbala: Susyulujiya Al-Khitab Al-Shi'i* (1999), searches *'Ashurā* mourning in the socio- political dimensions and folklore in Iraq until 1969. Al-Haydari demonstrates that Shi'a mourning rituals that are practiced during *'Ashurā and Al-Arb'ain* have a function that exceeds the religious dogmatic level to include social and psychological one because these rituals. He claims these rituals are:

> "Not necessarily connected with religious belief, but some have elevated it to belief level because of social and psychological reasons and motifs related to self protection, identity, purification from sins and guilts, eradicating guilt complex, compensating for inability when weak and humbled, reconnecting the socio- cultural links destroyed by modern socio- political and economic

[222] Fernea 71-72.

structures, and finally rebuilding the human being, gaining respect, and identity." [223]

Mourning rituals appear here, in addition to supporting religious thoughts, as a social and psychological reaction parallel to the painful reality that have been imposed on them by severe socio-political and economic circumstances. In this view, Shi'a would not have been able to endure without these mourning rituals. Although, the face value of these mourning rituals seems superficial, as a negative reaction towards the challenges of reality and the inevitable confrontation, these rituals have given expression to many aspects of confrontation, where they have been used as a political tool in the face of these challenges. Apart from that, these rituals have been used to raise the revolutionary morals which are enhanced by remembering the battle of Karbala and Al-Hussein's martyrdom. The strength these rituals provide lies in the fact that participants gain some of what they seek as solutions to facing challenges and overcoming difficulties and perils on their path; whether psychological, or social or dogmatic solutions.

Ibrahim Al-Haydary, in his study gives us an important sociological study on the calamity in Karbala and the practices of the mourning rituals in Iraq. He mentioned various essential aspects of these rituals from the point of view of sociology, anthropology, politics, history, literture and psychology. He mainly relied in this study on the ethnography of rituals in Al-Kadhumya, Baghdad in 1968 and Lebanon in 1975. The book was written in Arabic and published in 1999 and is considered one of the most important references for the study of

[223] Ibrahim Al- Haydari, *Trajidiya Karbala: Susyulujiya Al-Khitab Al-Shi'i,* (Beirut: Dar Al Saqi, 1999) 85-86.

mourning rituals of Iraqi Shi'a, though it is limited to the study these rituals as they were in the 1960s and early 1970s.

In *The Shi'ite Movement in Iraq* (2003), Faleh A. Jabar, (1946-), a sociological scholar, provides a significant chapter on Iraqi Shi'a rituals as popular culture that seeks to develop mourning politically. He argues that "Both the clerical class with its canonical-textual culture and the urban Shi'ite middle classes with their modern ideologies and structures may utilize these rituals as conduits of mass politics."[224] The most active participants in *'Ashurā* and *Al-Arb'ain* rituals have practiced political roles according to each one's vision and direction. For example, the reciter's function shifts to conveying not only social injustices but also political ones, too. In addition to that, these rituals reflect the hegemony of individuals or groups over another, such as the role of a tribe's *sheikh* and his attempt to consolidate his authority over others by playing the role of reciter in *Majilis Al-'Aza.* Thus, these rituals have developed a strong element of fear for the Iraqi government due to the strength the rituals give to their Shi'a participants. That led the government to impose restrictions on the participants in early years of the 1970s which escalated to the gory confrontation between the government and participants in 1977. Afterwards, the rituals were banned officially in the early 1980s and after the break out of the Iraq-Iran war. Jabar relies in his study on Robert Fernea's observations and thoughts on rituals of *'Ashurā* and *Al-Arb'ain* as practiced by the Shi'a in the late 1950s at the same place where Fernea authored his book *Shaykh and Effendi*.

[224] Faleh A. Jabar, *The Shi'ite Movement in Iraq*, (London: Saqi Books, 2003) 185.

Most of the previous studies that dealt with mourning rituals practiced by Iraqi Shi'a on *'Ashurā* and *Al-Arba'in* are very limited and do not represent a good opportunity to comprehend these rituals. These studies, mentioned here, remained within two frameworks. First, they have been conducted tens of years ago, and though they shed light on some important aspects to study these rituals, they with time, became limited only to providing a historical background for the rituals. For example, the information we could get from Nakash, Fernea, or Al-Wardi is limited to times before the 1950s if not earlier. There's a time gap that separates us from the time of writing these books, while we could see many important changes in the rituals including decisive socio-political changes that occurred to the participants of these rituals and their local and regional surroundings. In addition, Shi'a mourning rituals have been freely practiced in Iraq since 2003, and the practice of these rituals has been accompanied with major changes in the structure of the Iraqi society before and after that time. Secondly, these studies are lateral and do not give a comprehensive view of mourning rituals. For example, Faleh A. Jabar's study remained limited to the political aspect of the rituals especially when he dedicated only one of 17 chapters to the Shi'a movement in Iraq and their role in framing and redesigning the Iraqi political pattern. As for Ibrahim Al-Haydari's study, though it is dedicated to mourning rituals, it does not study developments that occurred to the rituals in the recent years, in addition to the fact that it offered little help to Western researchers as it is only published in Arabic.

In this study, I endeavored to research the mourning rituals of Iraqi Shi'a to contribute to the knowledge of these rituals, and their impact and role in producing and reproducing the Iraqi Shi'a community. I have done my best to give a study that is useful and valuable to meet the need in academic studies targeting this topic. My background, Arabic speaking and having lived in Iraq for more than 30 years until 1999, has helped me deal with the Arabic references along with recent changes to the rituals and their participants. Because of my desire to present a serious study on this subject, I went back to Iraq again by the end of 2011 to conduct a field study.

According to the information available to me from the main historic references on *'Ashurā* rituals, in addition to what I acquired from my field study in their setting in Iraq, I found rites of passage that were studied first by Van Gennep, and developed later by his follower Victor Turner are the appropriate framework for study mourning rituals in this research. The three basic levels of Turner in rites of passage which are separation, marginality, and re-aggregation are important levels and a part of the rituals practiced in *'Ashurā* and *Al-Arb'ain*. I will elaborate more on the link between Turner's model and mourning rituals of Iraqi Shi'a in the two chapters on *'Ashurā* and *Al-Arb'ain*.

Just like other passage rituals, *'Ashurā* and *Al-Arb'ain* offer their participants the opportunity to bring about some change resulting from practicing their rituals. I could claim that one of the significant aims of practicing mourning rituals by Iraqi Shi'a on *'Ashurā* and *Al-Arb'ain* is their desire to have some change in social, political, economic, psychological, and spiritual status. The

mourning rituals they practice on Al-Hussein's martyrdom occasion are meant to help them transform in term of place and time and return to their roots which they think have taken shape by the moment of Al-Hussein's martyrdom in Karbala. Thus, by their return to their essential symbols, Shi'a can maintain their future and existence.

G. Conclusion

Mourning and sadness rituals practiced by individuals and groups, result from loss of a close person or an influential figure in people's lives. Mostly, mourning rituals originate as a psychological reaction to loss, and the individual who practice mourning rituals passes through many complex psychological stages to overcome his or her loss by changing the psychological relation between loss adaptation and finally accepting the new reality. Mourning rituals are usually accompanied by sharp changes in the mourner's psychological state which is reflected in their social state and relation to social surroundings. If, mourning, from psychological perspective, is normal healthy state, as long as the mourner's state does not develop into sickness, then it bears important social significances, especially the positive outcomes of collective weeping on the participants. Some scholars have overstated matters by claiming mourning rituals resulting basically from social needs to express the dominance of collective spirit in the community and that they are the base for actions and different behaviors.

Mourning, as a rite of passage, helps participants change their social state, too. The stages the mourners pass through, separation, transition, and reaggregation, help in reintegration and harmony in the community. This, in its turn, helps in

building the society's identity and maintaining it against the perils of change. As a result, the aims of practicing mourning rituals may turn, due to historic circumstances and political contradictions, into means of resistance and compensation of inability, weaknesses in the desire for confrontation. Therefore, the significance of mourning varies to include psychological, social, faith, and political aspects. Mourning rituals have the ability to meet the needs of their participants and help them change their psychological and social state. Mourning rituals are effective means to resist grave dangers.

Chapter 4

DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS OF ‘ASHURĀ RITUALS

A. Introduction

This chapter gives an exposition and analysis of the data and outcomes of the fieldwork I conducted during the *‘Ashurā*[225] rituals of *Muharram* 1433 AH. - November 27th to December 6th, 2011 C.E. During this time field study I collected significant amount of information on mourning rituals through attending various ceremonies in their actual settings, like memorial services, processions of the martyrdom of Al-Hussein, reciting Al-Hussein’s death story, the *Tweareej* Run, tent burnings, and theatrical scenes among others. I also conducted interviews with active participants in these rituals, and with Shi’a scholars in addition to obtaining invaluable documents that shed light on *‘Ashurā* mourning rituals.

‘Ashurā rituals practiced in the first ten days of *Muharram* every year have a great significance for the Iraqi Shi’a community. These rituals and their reoccurring practices contribute to building the Shi’a community by reproducing the religious experience and rendering it a distinct socio-cultural framework within the generic Iraqi society. Religious concepts based on faith and traditional Shi’a resources encourage and motivate people to adopt and practice mourning rituals and assure their periodic repetition which leads to the firm adoption of these rituals.

These rituals express other experiences not only for religious reasons but because they also directly influence the participants’ daily lives. These symbols

[225] For Iraqi Shi’a, they use *‘Ashurā* to refer to the tenth day of *Muharram*, as well as the first ten days of *Muharram*. Also, they consider the whole *Muharram* month, as *‘Ashurā* as well. I will be using *‘Ashurā* day to refer to the tenth day of *Muharram*, and *‘Ashurā* to refer to the ten days.

are also sought by individuals for material purposes as they believe that the symbols are capable of increasing their income and material resources, healing their diseases, extending their lives, and protecting them from various perils. For the participants of these rituals, these symbols seem to play a magical role and sacred role, and consequently help them maintain their relation with the sacred, and which in turn invigorates their practices of these rituals.

Turner's model of the rite of passage is a suitable one to apply to mourning rituals of Iraqi Shi'a as a passage because they create a communitas or non-structuralized society.[226] I will argue in this chapter, that the Shi'a community in Iraq is holding a position similar to Turner's notion of communitas as a kind of phenomena. What I mean by this, is that communitas is not relatively distinct and seeks to survive and grow to create balance with society's structure through practicing rituals to bring change to participants' social status.[227] These rituals help them to change this status even if momentarily, hence their reputation. Each time they make a show of a different solidarity and different relation of power drawing from these historical events, and sacred and spiritual symbols which are used to convey a sense of righteousness and marginality. Iraqi Shi'a also are living within a society, that is a Muslim society and yet even though they are a larger population of the society, they still become marginalized by the Sunni population socially, economically, and politically. They seem in that sense

[226] In his book *Religious Performance in Contemporary Islam: Shii Devotional Rituals in South Asia (*University of South Carolina Press, 1993), Vernon James Schubel used Turner's model to study the role of Shi'a rituals in religious piety in South Asia.
[227] Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*, (New York: Gruyter Inc., 1969) 96.

something that is within this structure, and yet by practicing their own rituals, they create a different space for themselves.

Turner found that ritual processes consist of three phases, separation phase, margin or *limen* phase, and re-aggregation or reincorporation phase:

First: The separation phase, according to Turner, is the separation of participants from their social structure and expresses participant's symbolic embodied practices through their separation from a given past point in their social structure or from certain social circumstances, or both.[228] This phase can be seen clearly during the preparation or early beginning of practicing the rituals where participants seek to prepare themselves spiritually and materially, either by wearing certain ritual costumes or preparing their bodies or hearts to start separating from their usual reality.

In *'Ashurā* rituals, one can see the separation phase occurring through the raising of Husseinite flags and pictures before the beginning of *Muharram*. Raising flags and pictures provides many symbolic meanings to the participants that prepare them to participate in the *'Ashurā* rituals. Also, during mourning councils (*Majalis Al-'Aza*), verbal communication is one of the means of separation where participants utter certain phrases that declare their preparedness to enter stage of separation. The reciter asks the participants to repeat phrases as "bless those who pray for Mohammed and his family" (*Aflaha man salaa ala Mohammed wa ali Mohammed).* Then the reciter reads elegies that help the participants separate from their present reality to enter the next stage of rituals.

[228] Turner 94.

The focus on the story and events of the Karbala battle create an atmosphere of recollection of the event and participants embark on a historical journey where all experience and feel the depth of this tragedy.

Second: The margin or *limen* phase, according to Turner, is a transitional phase where participants' social status is perplexing and ambiguous and consequently marginalized. Ambiguity, the participants' state in this stage, occurs because of passing through a cultural domain that lacks the stability of both the past and the future.[229] The marginal phase sits between the prior status of the participants and the one they expect to have after completing all the rituals. Being a transitional phase, the participants express themselves using various rich symbols in order to be able to handle new variables that do not belong in their usual reality, which requires, in turn, similar treatment outside the familiar contexts.

In *'Ashurā* rituals, the marginal phase happens through the body movements include chest beating, head laceration, burning tents, and the *Tweareej* Run. To enhance the ritual activities, participants use numerous images and drawings and symbols to accelerate the harmony between themselves and the phase of ritual. Individually they are hoping to change their social status, while collectively they are trying to recreate their collective identity and maintain their future existence. There is no result in this stage because it is like a "threshold" to the change that could happen at the end of the rituals. This stage is very ambiguous because the participants are between the marginal phase and the rite of passage. Thus, the

[229] Turner 94.

participants cannot recognize their reality and their future until they pass through the next phase.

Third: The re-aggregation or reincorporation phase, where through this passage the participants acquire particular rights and duties clear and known to them, which imposes on them certain ethical responsibilities toward the others.[230] The shift of the status would be achieved after the completion of this stage.

After practicing *'Ashurā* rituals, the participants achieve the status of Husseinite (*Husseiny*) or Al-Hussein's slave (*Khadem Al-Hussein*), which is a title that signifies their individuality and importance. The title refers to piety and righteousness and hard work for Al-Hussein, and it ensures the bearer distinctive status within the Shi'a community. A *Husseiny* would enjoy some preferences and moral and psychological influence on those surrounding him, and consequently he is encouraged to sacrifice more in the upcoming years. Thus, *'Ashurā* rituals support Shi'a individually and collectively to gain a change. This change can occur either in one's social status or through a spiritual manner.

B. Reception Ceremonies of *'Ashurā*

1. Early Preparedness to Reception of *'Ashurā*

The separation phase can be seen among the participants in the beginning of *Muharram*. This phase helps prepare the participants and the environment around them to be ready to separate from their current structure. During *Muharram*, Iraqi Shi'a cities give a show of mourning and sadness on this occasion. The most important features are raising flags, clothing public places in black, putting tents

[230] Turner 95.

up in squares to prepare for *'Ashurā* ceremonies and provision services for the participants.

Shi'a buy numerous colorful flags and Husseinite images and install them on roofs and facades to receive *'Ashurā*. It is rare to find any Iraqi Shi'a house without these green, red and black flags which symbolize different meanings in *'Ashurā* rituals. Many private vehicles also raise these flags to clearly declare themselves as mourners of Imam Al-Hussein. Many images are hung on the facades of houses, shops, and even government offices. These images represent imagined pictures of Al-Hussein and some of his family members who were martyred with him in the Karbala battle. These images and flags remain hanging for the duration of *'Ashurā* and *Al-Arb'ain* as a power that will be transmitted from these symbols.

Tents are erected in public squares and streets and are used as centers for public gathering processions of Al-Hussein (*Al-Mawakib Al-Husseiniyya)* where basic services are provided like food, drinks, rest, and sleep. These tents substitute homes and sometimes mosques and *Husseiniyat,* plural of *Husseiniya* which is a place for Shi'a religious rituals and celebrations, which are not sufficient to serve the huge numbers of participant's coming from remote places. Some tents are put up specifically for services and sound systems are set up for chants and *latmiyat.* Other tents are used for services and mourning councils (*Majlis Al-'Aza)* where *quraya* live recitations and *latmiyat* (plural of *latmiya*) are given. Not far away, youth groups could be seen wearing clothes that are historically known as those of

the troops of Imam Al-Hussein and Yazid's armies, and rehearsing for *tashabih* theatre to be performed on Muharram 10th.[231]

During this time, temporary shops provide seasonal products used exclusively in '*Ashurā* rituals, for example, shops selling audio CDs of chants and elegies *niyahah* and *latmiyat*. The best selling reciters are Basim Al-Karbalaee, Sayid Hassan Al-Karbalaee, and Mulla Jalil Al-Karbalaee. CDs of mourning elegies (*niyaha*), which are tragic chants mourning Al-Hussein and his family, are sold and listened to everywhere. The business of selling Husseinite flags, images and posters made of cloth or paper is of high demand. Another example of seasonal business are the shops selling tools of *tatbir, zangeel* and kitchen utensils, all of which are much more expensive than CDs and flags. One can also rent tents, amplifiers, bulbs and other products used in mourning councils. The rituals generate certain types of businesses a few weeks before *Muharram* to finish off after *Al-Arb'ain.*

The separation of the participants appears clearly through refraining from practicing many of their usual everyday life activities. These include abstaining from marriage, weddings and celebrations during *Muharram* and *Safar*. Non participants of Shi'a also follow these traditions. Another tradition is wearing black clothes to signify mourning for two months mostly by women which is similar to what people do when they mourn the loss of a loved one in the family.

As the separation phase in *'Ashurā* rituals, flags play a special role as they are important symbols that signify passing from one stage to another. A flag is the

[231] A group of young men, around 30, training in Sadr City (Section 35) in Baghdad on January 12, 2011.

sign that refers or signifies something, and it is the place for fighters to meet at times of war.[232] A flag could also reflect its bearer's characteristics and traits. That is why flags are widely used during *Muharram* and *'Ashurā* rituals to indicate the beginning of the main rituals of the historic battle of Karbala. The bearers of flags or those standing by them are not only participants in the rituals but also actual advocates of Al-Hussein and these flags are symbolic means to take them to past time (the actual time of the Karbala battle to participate in it and defend Al-Hussein and his family). The more flags there are, the bigger the force wishing to participate and a surer indication of its victory.

Flags used in Iraqi Shi'a mourning rituals reflect the participants' identity and background. Most individuals and groups participating in the rituals come from different tribal groupings (*A'shira*)[233] that still play a structural and influential role in the persona of their members up to this day. Each tribe is still represented by color coded flags called *bairagh.*[234] A distinguished tribe member carries the flag during battles against other tribes.

Flags are still in use in countryside and towns in our days and they are raised during funeral services for tribe members. That is also done during *hosa* which is a dance conducted in a circular motion and accompanied by poetry and is usually performed at a tribe member's death and other occasions. This dance is usually enthusiastic and reflects the tribes and its members' merits. Though *bairagh* is not

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[232] Al-Khalil bin Ahmad Al- Faraheedy, *Kitab Al-Ain*, Ed. Abdulhameed Hindawi, Vol. 3, (Beirut: Alkutub Alaalmiya, 2003) 222.
[233] Even though, I am aware of the problematic usage of the term tribe in anthropology and social sciences, the fact is in Iraq this term is used, and it translates to the word "tribe."
[234] The *bairagh* is the specific flag of a tribe (*A'shira*). In Iraq, each *A'shira* has its own specific flag that symbolizes that tribe.

used anymore in tribal conflicts due to normal civilizational changes in general, but tribe members still see it as a symbol that represents past and future of the tribe and uses a means for them to be moved to a past filled with glory and victory achieved by forefathers in battles against their enemies. As a result, raising Husseinite flags of various colors is symbolic expression of its ability to mobilize a group and direct it to a certain direction. This also reveals the tribal background and identities the participants in *'Ashurā* rituals and reflects remains of this tribal spirit that is still alive and active up to this moment.

Flags used in *'Ashurā* rituals differ in color; some are green others are red or black and some other colors. Green is the color of Islam in general and is not a mourning specific color because green flags could be raised during joyful religious ceremonies like Shi'a Imams' birthdays and other ceremonies. Red flags refer to martyrdom, sacrifice, and blood where red is central to these rituals; it is the color of the event (Karbala) and the loss (Al-Hussein). Black flags refer to mourning and loss which is the state of the participants in the rituals of Al-Hussein himself. It is a symbol of the participants that reflects their mourning over Al-Hussein's bloodshed in Karbala. Other colors, for instance, white and yellow, are not as commonly seen. They are secondary and not that significantly important to the rituals, and are more peripheral and may have even been introduced by the tribes.[235]

[235] Ala' Hameed mentioned that the color of the Shi'a icons depended on three main colors; red, green, and black. The other colors as yellow and white appear more peripheral. The reason for that, according to him, is because the reference of colors in the Shi'a icon has a symbolic moral dimension, so that we can not interpret the colors according to its visible direct appearance but to its interpretation according to the Shi'a index. See Ala' Hameed, "Icon in the Sub Culture Pattern: A Field Study in Baghdad City," MA thesis, University of Baghdad, 2010. 115.

2. Ceremony Flag Changing: A New Phenomenon

The night before the first day of *Muharram*, crowds in front of Al-Hussein's shrine were chanting *Lebayk ya Hussein…Lebayk ya Hussein* (Hussein at your service…Hussein at your service) when a person from processions of Al-Hussein in Karbala changed the red flag on Al-Hussein's shrine dome, with the mourning black one. Enthusiasm went up and participants chanted (Hussein...Hussein) for a few minutes. Then they started *latmiya* on the rhythms of an old Iraqi chant recited by Hamzeh Al-Sagheer from amplifiers around Al-Hussein's shrine square (*Al- Sahan)*. This chant is special for the agonizing beginning of *Muharram*. It says:

Oh *'Ashurā* month, second to no other

During you, Sajjad's father's [Al-Hussein] heart was broken

Oh '*Ashurā* month, you triggered sorrow

During you, Al- Mustafa's son's [Al-Hussein] throat was blooded.

Then, the red flag was taken down on the drum beats of the processions of Al-Hussein band and handed to the Al-Hussein shrine in Karbala. Changing the red flag with the black one on the first night of *Muharram* is the declaration of the beginning of *'Ashurā* rituals. This change of scene reminds us of the scene of flying a flag and igniting the Olympic torch, where both kindle the crowd's emotions and signaling the beginning of a recurrent ritual that everyone would live some of its aspects.

In Al-Abbas' shrine, 400 meters from his brother Al-Hussein's, another ceremony of flag change is happening. Al-Abbas' flag is red with "*ya qamar Beni*

Hashim" (Moon of Prophet Family) inscribed on it to signify Al-Abbas' importance. It was taken down from Al-Abbas' dome and replaced with a black one which reads "You are the water giver to the thirsty at Karbala" which signifies his role in providing water for Al-Hussein's family in Karbala. During the flag change, crowds chant "At your service Hussein...At your service Abbas." Others start *latmiya* on their heads while repeating "Oh Fadhil's father (the nickname for Al-Abbas), stand up for us, they burned tents over us" as they are running in a small circle.

Changing flags is a relatively new event, since it is not referred to in scholarly references and is not mentioned as part of the mourning rituals. I, personally, had not heard of any reference for it before leaving Iraq in 1998. In fact I came to know, during my field study and from multiple references, that this ritual was introduced for the first time in an organized manner in 2006. It used to be performed prior to 2006 but without a ceremony, unlike the case I witnessed during 2011. Changing the flag of Imam Al-Hussein and Al-Abbas appears as the particular flags of the Shi'a community. Changing flags could have many different implications. Since the pressure of the Baath regime is lifted, Iraqi Shi'a now perform it. It could be that there is a relationship between changing flags of Imam Al-Hussein and the occupation. Raising the flags that represent Imam Al-Hussein and the fact that these flags are not the ones that are being put as the flags of the country, may also be seen as a reaction of the Shi'a community. It is a different kind of solidarity and implication from the flag that is imposed on them. In addition to that, changing flags in this particular way appears as a main and

clear point to the separation of the participants from their actual structure and their everyday lives. Changing the flags in a certain place (shrine of Al-Hussein) and at a certain time (one night before the first day of *Muharram*) allowed this action to be as an actual separation phase to the participants from their current reality, and allowed them to transition to the next phase.

Here are some of my notes from that period on that:

First, the general trustee of Al-Hussein shrine gifted, for the first time, a black flag with 'Oh Hussein' inscribed on it to all the shrines, *Husseiniyat*, and Shi'a mosques, in addition to Fatima Al-Maasooma's shrine in Iran and other Shi'a sacred shrines.[236] This indicates the success of the initiation of this new experience and that it has gained approval from others for being an element of excitation to the participants. There are many interesting shifts that are happening. More and more of these rituals become inter-connected between nations, becoming transnational. They influence one another, but yet are selectively drawn by different groups according to how it speaks to them.

Second, flag change occurs in all places at the same time after sunset and dinner prayers on the night before *Muaharram* 1st. This indicates the unified collective conduct of Shi'a at the exact moment as if they are making a special Husseinite time. They launch the ceremonies of flag change at the same exact moment in hundreds of Shi'a cities and towns all around Iraq in addition to thousands of *Husseiniyat* in Iraq and all over the world.

[236] Haider Al-Salamy, Private interview, 3 Dec. 2012.

Third, flag change makes Karbala the destination of another compass as being the capital for Shi'a in *'Ashurā*. All hearts head in Karbala's direction, all flags rise in memory of its martyr who is eternally present in it through rituals and practices. It is the flag that waves over Shi'a heads wherever they are.

Fourth, the spiritual role played by the sacred shrines in Iraqi lives makes them established institutions capable of control, change and practicing authority within the Shi'a community. Consequently, the institutions are active in producing and supporting the Shi'a identity in Iraq and other Shi'a regions all over the world.

Al-Hussein's red flag on the top of his dome for ten months conveys the message that martyrdom's blood keeps waving as a witness. It is the martyr's blood unavenged, yet exactly as in the symbols of Arabic tribes where the family of the killed would not mourn him nor wear black till the killer is killed. Here too, the red flag is a declaration that its bearer is being back stabbed and is still unavenged. It instigates revenge as if the bleeding of the killed would never stop nor dry.

Al-Hussein's flag bears other significance. In the future, this flag will be carried by his great grandson, the twelfth Imam Mohammad bin Al-Hassan, the Waited Mahdi (*Al-Muntazar*) who has miraculously disappeared, to appear again in an uncertain time to once again raise Al-Hussein's flag. Who having miraculously disappeared, would appear again in an unknown future, but on an

even year, maybe on *Muharram* 10th, to carry the flag.[237] It is then Al-Hussein's flag that he would raise to claim justice and take revenge for Imam Al-Hussein.

The actual killers of Al-Hussein were killed later by the *Tawaboon* (Penitents) movement led by Al-Mukhtar Al-Thiqafy. Al-Thiqafy killed Omar bin Saad, Obeidillah bin Ziyad, and Bin Thiljawshen. But it seems that taking revenge for Al-Hussein and inflicting judgment on his killer means something else which might be an infliction of punishment on the unjust in extension to the actual killers, to accomplish social justice that Al-Hussein called for.

Flags are usually taken by the people as a way of acquiring sacredness and blessing of Al-Hussein, because they think these flags are symbols that carry the sacredness of Imam Al-Hussein, bringing blessings to their lives, especially in situations when life is not satisfactory. Those who have the flag would keep it in their houses for few days for blessing then pass it over. There are many people who are eager to touch and be blessed by it. Therefore, flags would be kept in many places by many people for its sacred capabilities. The act of flag changing is a clear sign of the separation phase. Thus, the next day (*Muharram* first) is one of the first days that the actual practice of *'Ashurā* rituals, which can be seen in their attendance of *Majlis Al-'Aza.*

C. Mourning Councils (*Majalis Al-'Aza*)

Majlis Al-'Aza represents the core of the matrix of mourning rituals performed in *'Ashurā*. *Majlis Al-'Aza* is the liminal phase in the *'Ashurā* rituals. First *majlis* starts on the first day of *'Ashurā* and that is usually after sunset and dinner

[237] Heinz Halm, *Shiism*, Trans. Janet Watson and Marian Hill, (New York: Columbia UP, 2004) 37.

prayers. An exception to that is the small *majalis* held by individuals in their places or earlier during the day before dinner prayers because the reciter has commitments to a bigger *majlis*.[238] *Majlis Al-'Aza* may take the name *majlis Husseini* because they are held for Al-Hussein as they are called in the Iraqi dialect *Majalis Al-Qraya* (reading councils), and the person who presents this ritual is called *Al-Qari* (the reciter or reader).

The word *majlis* (singular for *majalis*) is derived from sitting which is a place where people meet while sitting for some reason, a ritual for example, or a discussion. These *majalis* are usually held at homes, mosques, *Husseiniyat*, and public spaces especially when a *majlis* requires a bigger space. There are two types of *majalis*: public supervised by men and could be attended by women and women *majalis* run by women and attended without men.

1. Public *Majalis*

Majlis Al-'Aza or *Majlis Al-Qraya* comprises three main components: sponsor of *majlis*, reciter, and an audience. In some *majalis*, another factor is added, *radood,* whose function is to lead the participants in the rituals of *latmiya* and rhythmic elegies and usually takes his turn after the recitation.

The sponsor of the *majlis* provides a place and organizes the whole event, and pays all expenses of food and drinks, and of clothing the place with different flags, images and posters. The most important job of the sponsor is the selection of a distinguished reciter and *radood* to attract more participants to this event. The

[238] A Husseinite majlis in Baladiyat, Baghdad. It was held in a big tent erected in front of the sponsor's house (Ala's Father). The *majlis* started at 5:00 PM and last for 45 minutes and ended a while before sunset prayers. Then participants, around 30, moved to the nearby *Husseiniyah* place for sunset and dinner prayers and to attend *Majlis Al-'Aza* for an hour and a half.

richer the sponsor is the more chances he may organize a successful ritual and consequently acquires increased fame and prominent social status.

The reciter is a person who reads a Husseinite- religious sermon interposed with rhythmic lamentation poetry (*niyahah*). One of the things a reciter needs is to trigger the emotions of the participants and dramatically supercharge their passions with images from the Karbala catastrophe. This requires an effective voice and the ability to connect stories and linking them with the participants' daily life. There exists a school specialized in teaching reciters oratory, performance, and presenting in *majalis*. A reciter does not have to be one of a high ranking clergymen (*Ulama*), but most of them complete some level of religious education that entitle them to be qualified persuasive orators.

The audience of *majlis* is from different socioeconomic statuses too. Usually, high ranking people like Sayyids[239], leaders, famous peoples, tribal leaders, prominent figures, and the elderly sit next to the reciter. The rest of the audiences take different spots of the *majlis*. Most participants come from the same neighborhood or adjacent ones. Some figures attend the *majlis* on special invitations by the sponsor, the reciter or *radood*. The function of the participants is to listen to the lecture, cry, and participate in *latmiya* in some *majalis*. Additionally, some participants may donate money that is special for *'Ashurā* to Al-Hussein's *Sondoq* (box), which is usually put in a visible place as an open invitation for donations to develop the *majlis*.

[239] Descendants of the Prophet Mohammed, and they are much respected among the Shi'a.They are distinguished by wearing green or black head cover.

2. Performance of *Majalis*

During my fieldwork in Iraq, I attended the first *majlis* which was held in a *Husseiniyah* place in Al-Baladiyat quarter, Baghdad, on *Muharram* 1st (Sunday, November 27, 2011). Before the *majlis*, participants started coming from around the neighborhood or other places. The number of participants reaches 60 in the hall whose capacity is far more than that. The event sponsor greeted participants and ordered them tea which is brought in a big tray by a young man. On the prominent side of the place sits the *minbar* which is a big chair reachable by small stairs and is usually covered completely with black cloth. The reciter and some elderly sit close to the *minbar* while the audiences are facing it. At 7:00 PM sharp, the reciter stands up, others sitting next to him also stand up as a sign of respect. He kisses an arm of the *minbar*, takes the small stairs then seats himself on it. Now everyone could see him (see photograph 1).

The reciter *Al-Qari* asks the audience to pray three times for Mohammed and his family. He then greets the prophet and his grandson, Al- Hussein, and states his wish to having been able to participate in the Karbala battle and be martyred with Al-Hussein in a very sad rhythmic manner. Then, he recites a few lines of elegy. His voice is remorseful now and influences the audience, whose heads are down. He covers his face with his hands to hide his tears. This introduction takes five minutes. It is the step of separating the participants from their environment and reality.

The reciter gives a moral brief on Al-Hussein's traits and effective values in his persona and some historic stories supporting that. He seeks to urge

participants to focus on maintaining the relationship with the prophet and his family as they are the main symbols for Shi'a. Then, he stresses on some daily life events, criticizes them, and compares them with historical examples drawn from Mohammad's, Imams' and companions' lives being considered the role models for Shi'a Muslims. This section of the lecture resembles religious preaching. It takes 30 minutes.

Photograph 1: A *majlis* in Al-Baladiyat quarter, Baghdad, on *'Ashurā* 1st.

Then, the reciter moves into linking events with Al-Hussein's departure from his homeland (Medina) and his reasons for refusing Yazid's caliphate, which is the theme of the night. In the same way of his introduction, the reciter reads lines of *niyahah* which emotionally affect the audience. The audience starts crying which could be heard all around the hall. A person in the audience interacts more

with the sad images presented by the reciter, and starts raising his hand and beating his chest and forehead. This part is the last item in the *Majlis Al-Qraya*. It is the most important emotional part in the majlis. It lasts about 10 minutes.

After the *Majlis Al-Qraya*, *majlis* of *latm* immediately starts. It is a process of hitting the chest with one or both hands. The *radood* leads participants by chanting rhythmic poems that end with hitting the chest. Participants are usually organized in circles.

During the first three days, *latm* was less enthusiastic compared with the later days. In the beginning, the *latm majlis* started with what is known as *Al-Qaadiya* which is a kind of *latmiya* practiced only in the beginning of *Muharram*, when sitting and considered as a warm up into usual *latmiya*. During the last days of *Muharram* however, *latmiya* was practiced more enthusiastically and people no longer sat during this practice but performed *latmiya* while standing. Most of the participant's are young men. Islamic leaders do not participate effectively in *latmiya*. They practice *latmiya* symbolically and find it enough to stand behind the lines of *latmiya* participants. Severe *latmiya* or body harm activities like self flagellation are not ethically sanctioned for some of the high ranking clergymen (*Ulama*).

Majalis Al-'Aza shed light on figures that died in the Karbala battle according to the date of martyrdom. On the second night, the theme was Al-Hussein's reaching Karbala grounds. The next five days, the focus was on Muslim bin Aqeel, Al-Hussein's ambassador to Kufa, Habeeb bin Mudhaher, Burair, and Al-Hurr.

The participation in the last days of *'Ashurā* almost doubled. Visual effects were used as a catalyst in *majalis*. On the 6th day, assigned to Al-Hussein's nephew Al-Qasim bin Al-Hassan (see photograph 2), a young man acted like him while preparing for his wedding during the battle and walked through the hall. Many other young men participated in this activity wearing the historical green costume and carrying candles and trays of desserts to express their happiness for Al- Qasim's wedding which in fact did not occur because of the war and his subsequent death.[240] Al- Qasim's wedding, a mere folklore Shi'a story, reflects an aspect of Karbala's catastrophe. It reveals the deep tragedy of the mother and her hope in her son's wedding and her stolen hope due to his death.

Photograph 2: A young man acting like Al-Qasim bin Al-Hassan on his horse on Muharram 7th, at night in front of Al-Hussein's gate (*Bab Al Qibleh*).

[240] According to historical records, there was actually no wedding for Al-Qasim.

On the 7th day, assigned to Al-Abbas' story, a participant carries a tray in which there are two plastic hands, walks through lines of participants to represent Al-Abbas' hands that were severed in Karbala battle while he was on his way to fetch water for Al-Hussein and his family. The 8th day is assigned to Ali (Al-Akber) bin Al-Hussein who is presented as the obedient son to his father and sacrificed himself in defense of his family and religion. The 9th day is assigned to Abdullah, the infant son of Al-Hussein, who was also killed in the battle of Karbala.

The 10th day is the pinnacle of the *majlis* which is held two times, the first one in the morning, in which the story of the Karbala battle *Maqtal Al-Hussein* was recited and the second one was in the evening at 7:00 PM, as usual. The *majlis* continued until *Muharram* 13. The extra three days were for the funeral of Al-Hussein and those who died with him in the Karbala battle. It is customary in Iraqi society to organize a three day funeral for any person who has died.

Among many rituals of *'Ashurā*, *Majalis Al-'Aza* is one of the most important ones through which the structure of religious authority is consolidated. This occurs by influencing the crowds of participants within the boundaries put together by the religious institution represented by high ranking leaders. The reciter plays the role of a mediator between the participants, who represent most ranks of Iraqi society, in the rituals and the directions of the religious institution. *Majlis* becomes a means of communication with the thoughts of prominent religious leaders presented to listeners through their discussions with the participants in the *majlis*. Most of the time, the reciter becomes a conduit for the

participants' problems and concerns to reach religious leaders who would study them and give proper opinion *fatwa* about them. This helps leaders be up to date with what happens with the Shi'a community.

Majalis Al-'Aza play an important role in gathering and mobilizing participants, and preparing them psychologically and socially to be part of *'Ashurā* rituals. It also helps in maintaining the unity of the participants and linking them with each other within one social entity by keeping them in daily contact during the days of *majlis*. *Majlis* is a good channel to get to know others and consolidate social linkage amongst them.

Majlis Al-'Aza assists participants to enjoy a distinctive social status and maintain the three prominent people in it; the sponsor, the reciter and the participants. The sponsor's status becomes more distinguished than before because of his ability to run the annual *Majlis Al-'Aza*, and put the money and effort to serve the participants in the *majli*s. The participants call the sponsor as *Khadim Al-Hussein* (Al-Hussein's slave) which is a distinguished status amongst others. He becomes widely accepted, more successful in his work and other social life aspects.

As for the reciter of the *majlis*, his major role in the *majlis* helps him consolidate his social and religious status. He becomes more famous amongst the participants and powerful amongst leaders. The more famous the reciter is the more important role he plays in mediating between participants and leaders. His success and popularity helps him perform in bigger *majalis* of wider participation that pay more compared with the small ones in popular areas of poor classes.

Major *majalis* are usually sponsored by the well off like religious institutions, political parties, merchants, and other prominent figures.[241]

Participants seek to improve their psychological and social status. Practicing mourning rituals provides participants with the opportunity to change their social status because every person returns, after the completion of *majlis*, with a different status which enhances this person's standing. Any individual, by participating in *majalis*, declares his affiliation with the framework of the Shi'a community which enhances his standing amongst other participants and his social environment in general. This change brings about a positive aspect to the participant's psychological state, which will positively affect his family and many different aspects of daily life. Individuals make new friends that assist them in changing their personal mood and develop their social networking resulting in more success in their businesses.

3. Female *Majalis*[242]

Women's participation in public *Majalis Al-'Aza* in the mosques and *Husseiniyat,* is rare or at least limited compared to men's participation. Women attend only the major *majlis* held in main city streets or public squares.[243] Nonetheless, their participation is very restricted and they are not fully free to

[241] The *majlis* organized by Haj Firas, a Baghdad merchant, in Jamila, east of Baghdad, on *'Ashurā*. It was a big *majlis*, with lines of big tents for men and women. Ahmed Al Ibrahimy was a very famous reciter. The *majlis* was broadcast alive to many TV stations. It was attended by state officials and members of parliament.

[242] This women *majlis* was in Nasr Quarter, East of Baghdad. I was able to gather information about this *majlis* after I reached an agreement with one of the women who lived nearby as she was the sponsor of the *majlis*. She supervised all the ten *Majalis* in this quarter. I had many meetings with her to learn what happened in the *majalis* during the *'Ashurā* of 2011.

[243] In the *majlis* organized by the Sadr Martyr Bureau in Sadr City Thursday Muharram 5th, (Jan 12 2012), and the *majlis* organized by Abu Firas in the Jamila Quarter. The two *majalis* were held in the *'Ashurā* days of 2011.

attend some rituals. Female participants are required to be in secluded areas away from men. They should also take notice of traditional norms such as decency, *hijab*, and being restricted as to expressing their emotions. But it is different when they attend female *majalis* where they are free to participate and express their feelings.

Female *majalis* are an activity associated with mourning rituals held by women at their homes during *'Ashurā* and are usually attended by women only and their little children. There are often more than one *majlis* in a neighborhood, so women need to move from one to the other.

Women's *Majlis Al-'Aza* are, just like men's, run by three people parties; the sponsor, *Al- Mullaya*, and the female participants. The function of these three distinct spheres, is the same as in the men's *majlis*. The only difference is that they are women. The *majlis* is led by the *mullaya*, a religious word derived from the masculine word *mulla*. She recites *latmiyat* from her book of elegies. A *mullaya* is not required to have attained any level of religious education; she just has to be literate. She must be able to run the *majlis*, recite poems and *niyahah* which are a kind of lamenting common amongst Iraqi women where they sadly lament in unison repeated couplets. The fact that *mullaya* is literate and can recite, gives her a higher prestige.

The *mullaya* starts the ten *majalis* in the geographical area of my field study at 1:00 PM.[244] The timing is suitable for most women in the neighborhood. By then, they should have finished their chores like preparing food, cleaning, and

[244] The *mullaya* recited in ten *majlis* in this area. And there was another *Mullaya* reciting in another *majlis* in the same quarter.

shopping. They meet up at the sponsor's house before the *mullaya* comes in. In addition to the main reason of the *majlis* being for religious and spiritual interactions, it is also used as social exchanges between the women. They talk about different topics related to their families and daily life. When the *mullaya* comes in, food and drinks are offered to the participants. Food would differ from one house to another depending on a sponsor's financial ability. Some traditional drinks are usually offered including black tea, cinnamon and lemon tea. The *mullaya* signals the beginning of the *majlis* by saying (stand for Al-Hussein's mourning) and women stand up to start *latmiya.*

The role of female *Majlis Al-'Aza* and *mullaya* differs from that of the reciter and public *Majalis Al-'Aza*. The reciter plays the role of a mediator between religious authority and individuals, while the *mullaya* is restricted to performing the function of rituals only. This is mainly due to the huge difference between men's and women's roles in the religious institution. Influential religious posts are only for men, while women are given only a minor role. That is why female *Majalis Al-'Aza* provide a great opportunity for the female participants to express themselves outside the usual contexts and prove their ability to run these local events. Women have complete authority over the female *majlis*. That includes management, leading, and participation.

During my observation period, on the first day the *majlis* focused on a Al-Hussein's martyrdom story, practicing *latmiya*, and elegies. During the next six days, it dealt with the stories of Al-Hussein's companions. The sixth day attracts a wider audience. It is different from the other days. It is an exceptional one. It is

assigned to commemorate Al-Abbas and stresses his relationship with his sister Zainab and his pledge to protect her from the enemies in the Karbala battle. The brotherhood between Al-Abbas and Zainab reflects some concepts and life values for women and the participants' social background. On Al-Abbas' day, cake is offered as well as tea, which is called *Chai Al-Abbas* (Al-Abbas' tea). *Khubz Al-Abbas*, bread stuffed with basil, is also offered as a vow by women. Al-Abbas' persona for them is a distinctive one and enjoys special traits to distinguish him from others.

The days designated for Al-Abbas and Al-Qasim, the 6th and 7th day, for female *majalis* become really important days. Many women participate during these days. One of the things that can be seen during this day is fulfilling the vow made by these women to get their desire, such as getting married or having children, by bringing food, drinks, and sweets. Some have made a vow previously and when their wish is fulfilledthey want to comply with that vow, while others have just asked for their desire, but have already fulfilling the vow they have made.

Female *majalis* were held for 9 days because on the 10th day most women would be busy preparing food that is special for *'Ashurā* like *harisa*, a kind of grain soup, and *qima,* which is chick peas mixed with minced meat. They also would distribute food to neighbors and listen at home to the story of the martyrdom recited on radio or satellite TV by Abdilzahra Al Kaaby (1909- 1974), one of the famous reciters of the story of Al-Hussein's death (*Al-Maqtal*).

At the end of the female *majalis*, the sponsors give money to the *mullaya* for her effort in the *majlis*. I observed that no one would call that sum of money given to *mullaya* or reciter or *radood* as fees, but as a gift because they think their effort in the *majalis* is sacred and could not be valued by money terms. What is paid is a gift that helps its payer to have Al-Hussein's blessing. A *mullaya* would not request a certain sum of money, but most sponsors paid 25,000–30,000 Iraqi Dinars, in the poorer neighborhood, as a gift to the *mullaya* for reciting during the 9 days of this year, an equivalent of almost 25 U.S dollars.

Female *majalis* are a vital component of *'Ashurā* rituals. These *majalis* provide a chance for women to practice their rituals freely and have authority over the whole process of the rituals. In addition to that, these *majalis* give children an opportunity to prepare themselves to become important participants in these rituals. Most women bring their children to the majalis to get them accustomed to the rituals and to prepare them to participate in the future. That is why female *Majalis Al-'Aza* help make *'Ashurā* rituals a social value established, embodied, and followed up by the Iraqi Shi'a community.

Female *Majalis Al-'Aza* play an important social role in Iraqi Shi'a women's life. They help provide a meeting context for neighborhood women. Women use the time before the start of the *majlis* to discuss various issues they face in their daily lives, which is a chance to exchange information and experiences. Additionally, these *majalis* are considered a way of socializing amid the high pressure women have due to lack of other social and cultural opportunities and due to unsafe security conditions especially in the last few years. They are also, of

course, significant for their spiritual and religious aspect. The restriction on social networking makes female *Majalis Al-'Aza* paramount for them and bring about some entertainment in spite of the sad occasion.

Majlis Al-'Aza is the transitional phase, which Turner names the margin phase which means "threshold" in Latin.[245] As the participants enter this phase, they have waived from their previous structure and their state is unstable. On one side, they transitioned from their previous structure and their cultural domain, and on the other their state is still in the formation process. Their state will not be clear until the last phase from the ritual.

D. Processions of Al-Hussein (*Al-Mawakib Al-Husseiniyya*)

Processions of Al-Hussein refers to a group of people practicing a mourning ritual during *'Ashurā* days and *Al-Arb'ain* and each is called mourning processions (*Mawakib Al-'Aza*). It also refers to a group of people providing services to participants in these rituals and are called processions of services (*Mawakib Al-Khidmah*). Most neighborhoods, cities, religious institutions, and some political parties form a *mawkib* that carries their names and performs rituals and provides services in their local areas. These *mawakib* are not allowed to perform their rituals in Karbala, except the services *mawakib* because only *mawakib* of Karbala are allowed to practice their rituals in Karbala. But the case is different on *Al-Arb'ain* where every *mawkib* is allowed to enter Karbala and perform their rituals for four days close to Al-Hussein's shrine.

[245] Turner 94.

The head of a *mawkib* is called *Al-Kafeel* or sponsor, which is an inherited position from fathers and grand- fathers. Sons usually make sure they continue taking care of these *mawakib* and meeting their financial needs.[246] *Mawakib* need to have special permits in their local cities from a directorate called directorate of rituals, the Department of Husseinite *Mawakib* and Committees in Iraq and Islamic world. A sponsor would obtain a permit to lead his *mawkib* in a place he should specify. He should also specify the type of *mawkib,* whether service or mourning, in addition to submitting a list of his assistants. Though *mawakib* could play many roles, we could categorize them according to their function; the mourning *mawakib* or service *mawakib*. In one case, a *mawkib* could perform both functions.

The processions of Al-Hussein show the power and role of influential social establishments in the Iraqi Shi'a community that care for and organize the rituals of *'Ashurā* and visitation of *Al-Arb'ain*. These institutions have a distinguished role for the Shi'a community and those belonging to them enjoy respect and high social status amongst others. Owners and members of *Al-Mawakib Al- Husseiniya* usually make sure they remain connected with each other to maintain their social status and develop these rituals further. The processions of Al-Hussein, being socio- religious institutions, contribute to rebuilding social relations and solidify the Shi'a identity within their local areas. These *mawakib* are initiated by individuals living in the same neighborhood or city or those doing the same profession. Tribes give their names to the *mawkib* they initiate. And a *mawkib* in

[246] Haider Al- Salamy, Private interview, 3 Dec. 2011.

its turn maintains the tribal framework by focusing on the main values like generosity, offering food to the hungry, hosting guests, amongst others that distinguish the tribe from others.

1. Processions of Service (*Mawakib Al-Khidmah*)

A procession of service refers to a group of people offering various necessary and free services to participants in different Shi'a rituals. Examples of that are food provision, bedding, rest means, and other participants' needs in '*Ashurā* and *Al-Arb'ain*. These *mawakib* differ according to their finance, sponsors, and the needs of participants and the place. They are much needed during *Al-Arb'ain*, where I will discuss later.

There are service *mawakib* that can be observed in certain places like *takiyyat* that provide services to visitors and participant's in *'Ashurā* only and are in Karbala exclusively. Husseinite *takiyyat*, plural of *takiyya*, are places to host visitors to Al-Hussein's shrine during *'Ashurā* days and provide them with services near Al-Hussein and Al-Abbas' shrines. *Takiyya* is similar to Persian *takiyya* that was used originally for mourning ceremonies, until the nineteenth century when it became used mainly for housing *Ta'ziyeh* dramas.[247] Karbala *takiyyat* are registered under individual names from Karbala. *Mawakib* from outside Karbala are not allowed to have *takiyyat* in the city. There have been almost 140 *takiyya* that offer food, drinks and bedding, and use colorful lights to attract attention starting on the second day of *Muharram*. Karbala dwellers believe Al-Hussein's choice of stopping at their desert city is similar to these

[247] Samuel R. Peterson, "The Ta'ziyeh and Related Arts." *Ta'ziyeh, Ritual and Drama in Iran,* Ed. Peter J. Chelkowski. (New York: New York UP and Soroush Press, 1979) 65.

beautiful colorful lights from their *takiyyat*.[248] Though, they switch the colorful lights on the 9th of *Muharram* except the red ones, to signify Al-Hussein's martyrdom and his blood shedding.

2. Processions of Mourning (*Mawakib Al-'Aza*)

There are groups of people from the same neighborhood or city practicing *latm*, *zangeel*, *tatbir*, and *tashabih*. They are organized the same way as other *mawakib*. A founder of a *mawkib* provides necessary requirements and tools used in rituals like chains, drums, and clothes. These *mawakib* practice their rituals in their cities but they do so in Karbala during *Al-Arb'ain*. These *mawakib* organize parades in their neighborhoods at certain times decided by the organizers. Most of these *mawakib* start their rituals on the last five days of *'Ashurā*, but some might start earlier like in the city of Al-Kadhumya Baghdad.[249]

a. Processions of Back Chain-Lashing (*Mawakib Al-Zangeel*)

Zanjeel is derived from the Persian word *zanjeer* meaning chain. It is a group of chains at certain lengths that end with a wooden handle and is used by participants to hit their backs. The size of the *zanjeel* depends on what the participant chooses. The more chains, the heavier the *zanjeel* becomes, and the more pain it inflicts. *Zanjeel mawakib* starts largely after the 5th day of *Muharram* (see photograph 3).

[248] Sadiq Hussein Jaafer Al Anbary, Private interview, 4 Dec. 2011.
[249] I have watched many mawakib practicing the zanjeel ritual in Al-Kadhumya on *Muharram* 3rd, November 29, 2011. There were many parades of *zanjeel mawakib* like *majlis'Aza* of Taraf Al-Anbariyeen and *majlis 'Aza* Shabab Noor Al-Hussein near the shrine of *Imam* Musa bin Jaafer Al-Kadhum. I also attended some activities performed by these mawakib on *Muharram* 5th in Sadr City, Chwadir. 100 persons joined these *mawakib*. They walked at night on the borders of Sadr City close to Saddeh. Not far from them, there were other groups of young people wearing white pieces of cloths and practicing head laceration.

Photograph 3: Procession of back chain-lashing in Karbala on *Muharram* 9th.

A placard or flag with the *mawkib's* name comes in the front, while the head of the *mawkib* practices *zanjeel* amid the *mawkib*. *Mawakib Al-Zangeel* differs from others because its participants need more space to move freely. That's why the *mawkib* comes in two opposite lines with a good amount of space between them. And because these *mawakib* are usually practiced on the streets, the participants take the two sides of the road while the *radood* is in the middle walking next to a vehicle carrying loud speakers, a power generator, and night lights. The users of *zanjeel* need rhythm in harmony with their moves of *zanjeel* from one side to another and with the rhythm of the poem recited by the *radood*. The participants in performing *zanjeel* need to practice to learn to harmonize their moves. Children are usually seen with their parents, carrying a small *zanjeel* and

beating their backs gently. Some participants perform these rituals while smiling and talking, most of the time indifferent to the remorse and guilt of the emotional event. There are occasional expressions of sadness, but since it has become part of their everyday life people adapt to it.

b. Processions of Head Lacerating (*Mawakib Al- Tatbir*)

Tatbir means hitting the head with a sharp tool similar to a short sword called *qama* in Iraqi dialect. The ritual of *tatbir* was unknown to Iraqi society until the mid 19th century. It is the most dangerous ritual practiced in *'Ashurā* because it involves injuring the head and bleeding. The organizers of this *mawkib* are usually found in the middle with some elders to supervise the *mawkib* and the process of *tatbir*. They specifically help beginners to prevent them from exaggerating the practice of using the *qama,* and this moderation is vital in order to avoid serious injuries to the head. *Tatbir* is usually practiced on *Muharram* 10th (*'Ashurā* day). I will elaborate more in the 10th day section on *tatbir* rituals practiced in Al-Hussein's shrine in 2011.

c. Processions of Chest Beating (*Mawakib Al- Latm*)

This procession is comprised of groups of men who hit their chests either with one hand or both while repeating some couplets called (*raddah*) and they are called *lattamah*. A group in a procession repeats a couplet then the next group does the next and so on. All *raddah* start and finish with line poetry called (*Al-Mustahel*) which is repeated by all the groups in the procession. The contents of poems and *raddah* differ from one procession to another, but their essence is

about revitalizing images from the Karbala battle and how it relates to the participants' reality.

Some processions of *latm* seek to showcase socio-political criticism. The most prominent one in this regard is the mass procession of Taraf Al-Abbasiyeh. Members of this procession explain why their procession adopts political *raddah* and harsh criticism to successive Iraqi governments, "Hussein's revolution is originally against oppression and for the poor, the destitute, and the oppressed."[250] The inhabitants of this impoverished neighborhood (Taraf Al-Abbasiyyeh) take their place as the poorest and most damaged. That is why during the procession of 2011, they recited political poems while walking Karbala streets close to the shrines of Al-Hussein and Al-Abbas, where massive crowds participate with them in these political *raddah*. This type of event shifts mourning ritual to a semi political demonstration.

Processions of *latm* seek, by wide participation of participants and visitors, to express their demands and to attempt to change their reality. The *raddah*, they chant to improve their living standards and criticize their daily matters, expresses a type of social resistance practiced by Iraqi Shi'a by participation in '*Ashurā* rituals.

E. Performing Passion Plays (*Tashabih*)

Tashabih is a popular play staged on *Muharram* 10th, which reincarnates the historic Karbala battle and is performed by amateur actors. It is usually staged in public squares or near sacred shrines. Often, these amateur actors of one

[250] Almada, "Mawkib Al-'Aza wa Masreh 'Ashurā," *Almada Magazine,* 864 (2007):11.

neighborhood or city rehearse in their place before performing. There is no director for *tashabih* but the sponsor of the procession usually does the director's job and trains the actors. The actors and participants in *tashabih* are not paid. The sponsor pays for tools, clothes and the stage.

Tashabih in Iraq, similar to the Persian equivalent, played an important role in popular Husseinite mourning rituals since the beginning of *ta'ziya* during the Safavid reign in the sixteenth century, though, Iraqi *tashabih* is not as developed as the Persian *ta'ziya*. The Persian *ta'ziya* has developed, moving from streets and public squares to parks and backyards of markets and private homes. It reached its pinnacle in the 19th century with the establishment of a *Ta'ziya* Theater, *takiyya*, where religious and general performances were staged.[251] It remains restricted to *'Ashurā* days and stage performances in public squares and nearby sacred shrines and lacks its own place and staging techniques. The state and the upper class in Iran have contributed a lot to the development of *ta'ziya* while in Iraq *tashabih* has been underdeveloped because of continuous bans and a long history of restrictions.

Tashabih staged in Iraq in *Muharram* 1433 A. H.-2011 C.E. could be divided into two types of performances. The first presents shows in city streets for example about the arrival of Hussein's enemy army to Karbala in addition to few short performances that focus on one character like Al-Qasim or Ali Al-Akber. The second type performs the whole historic Karbala battle in a certain place and it takes hours.

[251] Ed. Peter J. Chelkowski, *Ta'ziyeh, Ritual and Drama in Iran* (New York: New York UP and Soroush Press, 1979) 4.

1. Passion Plays on the Tenth Day of '*Ashurā*

In Sadr City Baghdad, *tashabih* were staged on *Muharram* 10th and lasted almost three hours in a big public square. The audience formed a big circle. They are made up of different ages and gender; men, women and children who struggle to raise their heads to see the *tashabih*. The scenes were silent and body language and signs were used as an expression of the scene in *tashabih*. A reciter or *radood* related the story of the Karbala battle in a very emotional voice in the classic Arabic language. They usually use loudspeakers. The story telling coincided with the scenes staged and was accompanied by actors' moves.

During some emotional scenes, the interaction of the audience would increase and one could hear them shouting, crying, and sobbing. Every time one of Hussein's companions is killed, the reciter shifts to dialectal Iraqi and reads some elegies. Sometimes, another reciter does that then the main reciter continues his storytelling. During fencing scenes, the *radood* recites a short *latmiya* in which the audience participates in.

Colors are widely used in *tashabih*. Each signifies a meaning. Hussein's camp could easily be recognized from his enemies' by the colors of their clothes. Omer Bin Saad's army wears red and yellow, while Al-Hussein's companions wear full white clothes. Al-Hussein's family wears white clothes with green turbans. Al-Hussein is distinguished by his black clothes with green turban.

Warm colors are widely used by Al-Hussein's enemy. Red and yellow are the source for blood and fire, which were strongly present in Al-Hussein's enemy army that shed his blood and his family's and companions' on Karbala ground.

Then they burned the women's tents and those alive inside, too. Red and yellow, Al-Hussein's enemy colors, signify blood, fire, savagery and the bloodthirstiness of the soldiers who committed the gory Karbala massacre.

Cool colors are widely used in Al-Hussein's camp. White and green are signs of purity and hope which are the traits of Al-Hussein and his companions. Al-Hussein's dress was white which signifies his lack of evilness and his purity from sins and readiness for martyrdom. Green is the color of hope and goodness in Islam. *Tashabih* is not merely scenes presented by amateur actors, but actually are the chains of scenes wrought by multiple symbols and used in *tashabih* to express many meanings inside this ritual.

2. Short *Tashabih* and Symbols

They are scenes performed in a very few minutes during the parade of a procession or sometime they could be presented separately. One could watch a lot of these short scenes during the ten days of *'Ashurā*. On the first days of *'Ashurā*, the scenes of the arrival of Omar bin Saad's army to Karbala in their red and yellow clothes and armed with long spears. Close to them is Al-Hussein's army headed by Al-Abbas carrying a green pennant and repeating the scene where he attacks on his horse Bin Saad's army which flees in front of him.

These scenes attempt to present some active and influential symbols during *'Ashurā* and emphasize them to help become clear and reach the audience's mind. Amongst these various ymbols, each carrying unique meanings, is the bed of Alhussein's thirsy child, Abdullah, who was died on *'Ashurā* day. His bed appears in many places covered with green and white cloth and in it there is a doll

representing the child Abdullah whose neck got pierced by an arrow, while his blood spreads on his bed and white clothes to bear witness to the savagery of his killers.

Another symbol displayed in Karbala is a frame of metal ship that ends with a dragon head and is ornamented with colorful lights. A person carries this huge frame and orbits the place with it many times. For Shi'a, this ship signifies Al-Hussein as the light of guidance and survival ship (*Safeenato Alnajat*) that would take them to the coast of safety. Although Arabic and Iraqi Islamic culture does not refer to dragons, the ship ends with head of a dragon. Dragon imagery might have come from India Muslims who came to visit Karbala to practice mourning rituals. *'Ashurā* rituals reach their climax on the tenth day of *Muharram*. These rituals focus on the reoccurrence of the Karbala tragedy in the same place and at the same time.

F. The Tenth Day (*'Ashurā* Day)

The tenth day of *Muharram* (*Yawm 'Ashurā*) is the saddest day for Shi'a all over the world. It is on this day the tenth of *Muharram* 61 A.H., October 10th 680 C.E., that Al-Hussein was martyred in the Karbala battle. Also, Iraqis call this day as "*Yawm Al-Tabog*" which means the day of full collision of sky and earth because of Al-Hussein's martyrdom. Shi'a literature refers to many strange stories that appended during *'Ashurā* like "sky and earth cry for Al-Hussein's killing", [252] and other stories. On the *'Ashurā* day, the rituals reach the climax of the transitional phase. The rituals on this day are embedded with the battle of

[252] Jaafar bin Quluweh Al- Qomi, *Kamil Alziyarat,* (Beirut: Muassasat Al Fikr Al-Islami, 2012) 108.

Karbala. The actual time and place cease to continue, and instead are replaced by the time and place of the historical Karbala battle.

Since 1921, *'Ashurā* has been a public holiday in Iraq and this tradition continues to the present day. Not government in Iraq's history ever dared to cancel the holiday. During Saddam's reign, Iraqi media broadcast related the story of Al-Hussein's martyrdom by Abdilzahra Al-Kaaby (the most famous story teller of Al-Hussein's tragedy) and changed its daily broadcast to add many religious items and chants. Shi'a prefer not to do any daily business on *'Ashurā* and reduce their activities to practicing mourning rituals only.

On *'Ashurā* day Shi'a make sure to attend *Majalis Al-'Aza* in which *Maqtal Al-Hussein*, the story of the battle, is recited beginning at 9:00 AM and continuing until midday. Signs of sadness are on every face. After that, *latm* poems are recited. Then all rituals are halted at the call for noon prayers. And that is when they perform noon prayers and have special meals for the day such as *hareesa* and *qeema*. Some like to attend the *tashabih* where Al-Hussein's death is performed. Others visit Karbala to see Al-Hussein's shrine and perform the rituals of *'Ashurā* visitation. Those who cannot go to Karbala could read a piece of writing called *Ziyarat Al-Hussein* on *'Ashurā* day to visit and greet Al-Hussein remotely in line with methods referred to in Shi'a books.[253]

According to the ritual process of Turner, the participants will re-aggregate after the completion of the ritual and the passage. They will return with a shift in their status. The ritual of *Maqtal Al-Hussein* in *'Ashurā* appears as the end of the

[253] Abbas Mohammed Rida, Al-Qomi, *Mafateeh Al- Jinan,* (Beirut: Muassa Al- Ala'lmi Li Al-Matboaat, 1998) 528.

rituals. Then the Shi'a participants reincorporate and acquire their change that occurred during the practicing of *'Ashurā* rituals. Like most rituals, at the end of its practicing there comes a feast. Even in some Islamic rituals, a celebration occurs at the end. In Ramadan, a feast follows the end of the fasting ritual (*Eid Al-Fitr*), or for *Hajj* another feast follows the pilgrimage to Mecca ritual (*Eid Al-Adha)*. These celebrations show that the participants have completed the rites of passage.

The feast during *'Ashurā* is not as clear as the other events, since it is is an emotional one. We can also see the festival when the participants stay up all night without sleeping and as the older and younger men and women celebrating during this night, by making sure to participate in the preparation of his feast as a social reality. It is an *'Aza* (mourning) and yet a reality of survival. It is a way of sustaining the community. Imam Al-Hussein, in a way is the head of the community, and they are losing him, but yet are still surviving through it. They believed that Imam Al-Hussein sacrificed himself for him and for the community in order for them to receive social justice. Hence, Imam Al-Hussein became a heroic symbol that allowed the community to survive.

1. *Ashurā* Visitation (*Ziyarat 'Ashurā*)

'Ashurā visitation is one of the most important activities practiced on *'Ashurā* day. The Iraqi Shi'a, head to Karbala to visit Al-Hussein and his brother, Al-Abbas. Shi'a references emphasize this visitation and elaborate on the way it should be done.

Al-Hussein's visitors make sure to approach and seize the window that surrounds Al-Hussein's grave. The inside green lights are lit. They usually cry and show submissiveness. They implore Al-Hussein by his status to ask Allah to forgive their sins and be merciful upon them. Then each visitor asks as they need and wish. A visitor would read the text of Al-Hussein's special visit hung close to Al-Hussein's shrine, in addition to those who were martyred with him in the Karbala battle and are buried next to him. Men do the visitation separately from women. There are barriers to prevent mixing at times of visitation and prayers inside the shrine. After this, they head to visit Abbas whose visitation is performed in way similar to that of Al-Hussein's.

Al-Abbas' shrine is crowded with visitors. Men and women throw green patches of clothes on his shrine as vows to meet their needs and wishes. Throwing a green patch on sacred shrines is a means of communicating with the Imams and engages high-profile figures as mediators between people and Allah. Some resort to writing on these green patches of cloths even if it is symbolic as in the passing of thumbs over it. Some wish silently.

Iraqis think Al-Abbas is not infallible like other Shi'a Imams. That makes him more capable of revenge, distraction and hurting others especially those who do not honor his oath. Swearing by Al-Abbas is the strongest oath especially for Shi'a in southern Iraq where Arabic Shi'a tribes are spread there and take Al-Abbas as an example that reflects their social Arabic Bedouin nature. Ali Al-Wardi thinks that these people describe Al-Abbas as the one whose head is hot and mean by this that he is hot tempered, easily angered, and his power to inflict

harm is immediate. People might dare to commit perjury on the prophet's or minor Imams' oaths, but they would not dare do the same with Al-Abbas.[254] Al-Abbas' name is still widely used by Arabic Shi'a tribes, even their members who live in big cities like Baghdad and Basra. They use "Al-Abbas' pennant" as an expression of an agreement respected by the two tribes and cannot be breached under any circumstances. The stories of death and Shi'a literature focus on Al-Abbas' persona that reflects courage, strength, heroism, gallantry, loyalty, commitment to vows, altruism, protection of honor, knighthood, and nobility. These traits are highly appreciated by Arabic individuals in general and form a part of Arabic tribal persona of a large number of Iraqi Shi'a.

2. Processions of Head Lacerating (*Mawakib Al- Tatbir*)

Processions get prepared to perform *tatbir* rituals in Karbala in the early morning of *Muharram* 10th. But there is a stage of parading and preparation prior to knifing the head with *qama* which is called *Al-Mashq*, or the speed of stabbing and hitting in Arabic.[255] The process of *Al-Mashq* starts on *Muharram* 9th after midnight. A procession leaves with all its members wearing the white shroud (*cafan*)[256] that are always put on a deceased before burial, carrying their *qamas,* daggers and swords, waving them in the air in a show of power similar to that before waging a battle to amuse the fighters and frighten the enemies' hearts. All

[254] Ali Al- Wardi, *Dirasat fi Tabeeaat Almojtemaa al Iraqi*, (Baghdad: Maktbat Alanee, 1965) 241.
[255] Majdaldeen Al- Feyroozabady, *Alqamoos Almoheed*, (Beirut: Mooassassat Alrisala, 2005) 924. Also see: Mohammed bin Abi Bakr Al-Razi, *Mikhtar Alsahah*, (Beirut: Maktabat Lebanon, 1989) 550.
[256] Muslims use white cloth called *cafan* to cover the deceased before burial. When the Shi'a wear *cafan* during some of their rituals, they try to show that they are not afraid of death and at the same time they are ready for death for their principles.

members who lacerate their heads the next morning join the procession. The flags usually come in the fore of the procession. The participants are in two lines across the road accompanied by drums, trumpets, cymbals and a *radood*. All bend with their swords without lacerating their heads while chanting "*Hayder…Hayder*" who is Imam Ali, Al-Hussein's father, with music and drumming and poems recited by the *radood* in loud speakers. This show starts from midnight till dawn.

In the dawn of *Muharram* 10th, processions of head lacerating participants begin performing this ritual. Hundreds of these processions pass through Karbala while participants knife their shaved heads. Their white shrouds become red. They parade on roads leading to Al-Hussein's shrine on the sounds of trumpets and drums while chanting "*Hayder…Hayder*." Crowds of men and women are lined up alongside the roads watching the head lacerators passing in front of them (see photograph 4).

Every procession stops at *Bab Al-Qibleh* which is one of the gates of Al-Hussein's shrine. A group of head lacerators wave their *qamas* and swords to a noise as if they are engaged in a real historical battle. Then they enter the shrine and lacerate their heads and keep waving their arms in the air inside Al-Hussein's shrine as a sign of renewing their allegiance to Imam Al-Hussein and their sincere wish to be his advocates. Their blood, being shed from their heads, is the most tangible evidence of their love for Al-Hussein and their strong belief in his principles, and also reflects their sorrow and bitterness for losing him, and also their compensation for the betrayal which they seem to identify as their own. From the inside of the shrine, processions diverged right to exit from another gate

and continued parading to Al-Abbas' shrine. There, they repeated the same rituals. When they left Al-Abbas' shrine, the procession of head lacerating diminishes until it comes to an end.

Photograph 4: Head lacerators near Imam Al-Hussein's shrine on *'Ashurā* day.

Head laceration is a significant ritual in which appears the peak of the *'Ashurā* rituals. During this ritual, we can see the collapse of time and place, and the participants outside their reality, and imagining themselves in the battle with Imam Al-Hussein. In the marginal phase, that Victor Turner mentioned, through the ritual process the time and social status are ambiguous. It is the moment passing through history, between the past and the present. They use one of the rich symbols (blood) to be able to handle changes that do not belong in their normative reality.

The process of head lacerating started after 5:00 AM and finished by the time of noon prayers at 12:00 PM. The number of parading processions reached 225. Most of these parades came from Karbala only. Head lacerating processions from outside Karbala were not allowed to enter the city. They performed their lacerating rituals in their individual cities.

Non-Iraqi processions are exempted from the ban. There were Iranian, Indian, and Pakistani parades of head lacerating that were performed in Karbala. The biggest one of them was the Iranian, because head lacerating was banned in Iran by the Supreme Leader of Iran, Ali Hosseini Khamenei. Also, the Iranian ministry of interior banned all forms of head lacerating in Iran since 1994.[257]

Traffic, licensing and timing were tightly organized by the Department of Husseinite Rituals, *Mawakib* and Committees in Iraq and Islamic World, stationed in Abbas' shrine. A day before *tatbir*, the committees in charge, the General Trust of Al-Hussein's and Al-Abbas' shrines, prepared an entry for the head lacerators into the shrines. They covered these entrances with nylon to protect them from blood, and spread sand on the grounds close to the gate to facilitate the entry of participants.

3. Reciting Al-Hussein's Death Story (*Al- Maqtal*)

The rituals started at the shrine at 9:00 AM on *'Ashurā* day. The story of Al-Hussein's death was read by a reciter who excelled in this area. The position requires a recite who possesses special characteristics like a strong voice, impact, and the ability to read for hours.

[257] Hassan Islami, "Al-'Aza Suna Deeniya Am Fiaael Igtimaaiy" *Jadal wa Mawaqif fi Alshaair Al Husseiniya,*Ed. And Trans. Haydar Huballah, (Beirut: Dar al Hadi, 2009) 334.

Thousands of attendees sat, chin down, and listened to the events of the killing through loudspeakers only overpowered by sounds of trumpets, swords and chants of "*Hayder…Hayder*" that came from outside the shrine and from processions that paraded inside it, too. Hundreds of thousands of mourners stood outside the shrine watching *qamas* and swords covered with participants' blood as if they were an endless army fighting Al-Hussein's enemies. The chants of "*Hayder…Hayder*" frighten even the hearts of mourners who stand still because it is difficult to move because of fear of the scene and its impact on them.

Attendees hold their breaths when the story reaches the death of Al-Hussein's son and his family members. As the end of the story nears, the noise level drops, and the reciter becomes increasingly worried and nervous. Before this, the reciter would be reciting with ease. Then the story comes to the point where Shimr bin Thil-Jawshan stabs Al-Hussein many times and cuts his head. All sounds and voices stop. For a few moments, one could only hear "*Ahhh....Ahhh...*" the expression of people's emotional pain, then they started to cry and wail, as if riding in a time machine, going back to the moment of painful tragedy of fourteen centuries ago and mourning the event in the Karbala battle (680 C.E.) as if it had just happened.

The end of *Al-Maqtal* does not mark the end of *'Ashurā* rituals in Karbala. Soon after that, a big number of organizers from the shrine's management committee come with ropes to prepare a path for crowds of runners to Al-Hussein's shrine participating in a ritual called *Tweareej* Run.

4. *Tweareej* Run (*Rakdhat Tweareej*)

It is a ritual performed by groups of mourners on *'Ashurā* day. It involves running a distance of five km from Qantarat Al- Salam to *Bab Al Qibleh* of Al-Hussein's shrine. It was given this name because the first person who did the run was from the town of Tweareej, Karbala city, away from Al-Hussein's shrine by nearly 25 km.

Tweareej Run is (*Rakdhat Tweareej*) a Shi'a ritual that dates back to 1878 and is established by Mirza Saleh Al-Qizwiny (died 1882). Tweareej, annexed to Karbala city, has special mourning processions. They usually leave the town walking on *Muharram* 9th heading to Al-Husseins shrine for visitation and mourning rituals. These processions walk for 25 km, then stop at Qantarat Al-Salam (5 km away from Al-Hussein's shrine) to pray and reorganize under the leadership of a Sayid member of the Al-Qizwiny family.[258] The Sayid rides his horse and gives the signal to run towards Al-Hussein's shrine. The participants start running or trotting while hitting their heads and chanting "*Ya Hussein… Ya Hussein*" (Oh Hussein… Oh Hussein). The member of Al-Qizwiny family leads this procession each year. No one else is allowed to do so.

On *Muharram* 10th 1433 (January 12, 2011), Sayid Thamir Al-Qizwiny led the *Tweareej* Run and gave the start signal. He was riding a white horse and black turban inherited from his forefathers, who had been leaders for more than 100 years. Huge torrents of people rushed after the noon call for prayers heading to Al-Hussein's shrine and hitting their heads and chanting "*Ya Hussein… Ya*

[258] Ali Al-Giboory, "Tweareej Run," *Majalat Alahrar*, 309 (2011): 20.

Hussein" (Oh Hussein… Oh Hussein). After they entered the shrine from *Bab Al Qibleh*, they left to Al-Abbas' shrine then to a square near the Husseinite camp to participate in the tent burning ritual.

This ritual is an attempt to reflect on the participants' desire to take leave of their actual time and to return to the past to reach Karbala to prevent of Shimr bin Thil-Jawshan from beheading Al-Hussein. Participants start running midday to coincide with the time of Al-Hussein's slaughter on *'Ashurā* day, as if they are expecting to overcome the distance of their time and place to reach and help Imam Al-Hussein at a suitable moment. The *Tweareej* Run ritual contributes in consolidating mourning rituals and sadness by reenacting the liminal moment and the attempt to enter into it and participate in its making. The symbolic call for the rush for help is an ever failing reality. The reputation of this mourning may also be seen as the fact that each time they cannot actually reach it, that it always happens, and they always have to come and continue to try and reach it. In fighting the injustice of that time, they are also trying to remember to fight the injustice of their time, as is seen with the injustice of Saddam Hussein in Iraq. Which resulted in the execution of those fighting for their justice, but even then, the civilians continued to fight for their justice. One of the main aspects of repetition here is to confirm their desire to make the changes they wish to seek.

One prominent aspect of *Tweareej* Run is that it expresses the tribal background of the participants and reproduces their societal values by practicing this ritual which resembles a tribal one called *fazaah*, which is rushing without delay to a relative or a friend for help and support in emergencies. This could

include help in a battle and participating in it or offer assistance in pressing circumstances. People often go out supporting someone as soon as they hear news without taking time to know the details or extra information as to what is happening, because they want to just be there at the site of the event before it is too late. And running is the easiest and handiest way. *Tweareej* Run seems as a Shi'a *fazaah* to support their Imam and offering the right help even if it is symbolic to deepen their feeling of participation in defending Al-Hussein and be on his side as much as they can.

5. Tent Burning

Participants in *'Ashurā* rituals headed to the site of Husseinite camp, 200 m away from Al-Hussein's shrine. It is also called *Khiyemgah* which is Persian for camp. Most of the people believe it is the same camp Al-Hussein started in the historic Karbala battle. Other historians think the current site is nothing but a building erected by the alderman Ottoman governor (*Wali*) Midhat Basha to host Sultan Nasser Addeen Shah and his army and entourage when he visited Karbala in 1868 C.E.[259]

Amid the square of celebration, there stands a big white tent sprayed with flammable materials and words on one of its poles read *Assalaam alaika ya ghareeb Karbala* (Peace be upon you…You stranger in Karbala) to indicate that it is Al-Hussein's tent. Al-Hussein is referred to as stranger or the stranger of Karbala because he was killed far away from his homeland. Some participants tied pieces of cloth to the tent as messages to Imam Al-Hussein, messages that

[259] Abdilamir Al-Qureyshi, *Almaraqid wal Maqamat fi Karbala,* (Beirut: Beyt Alaalm, 2008) 119.

contain their spiritual and material demands, hopes, and the desire that he helps them have what they want.

In another side of the square, not far away from Al-Hussein's tent, there were small green, blue, pink, purple, and red tents symbolizing Al-Hussein's family tents. One pole of a green tent read *Assalaam alaika ya hamee alkhyam* (Peace be upon you... You tent protector), referring to Al-Abbas. People usually describe Al-Abbas as the protector of tents and of the family of Al-Hussein on *'Ashurā* day.

Prisoners of war from Al-Hussein's family moved around the tents. They were wearing green clothes and guarded by soldiers in yellow, red and purple clothes and carried sword and spears. This meant Al-Hussein's family was taken as prisoners of war after the battle. When children pass through the crowd, people try to caress their heads for blessings. When more people rush toward the children, the soldiers intervene to protect them and keep the crowd at a distance. From a high place outside the square, a person stood and recited some Husseinite poems and gave comments on what was happening in the square. Then he gave a detailed account of what would happening later and stressed safety measures when the tent burning would start.

In a surprising moment, a horse entered the square. It had red spots, signifying Al-Hussein's martyrdom and the fall from his horse. Huge turbulence occurred when the horse came into the square. Many people tried to wipe the horse's back and then their faces for blessings. Then more turbulence occurred at the tents, and in a few seconds, the tents were plundered by those standing by them. Many

people competed to have a small piece from the tents which were torn into small pieces.

After a few seconds, knights in red clothes appeared carrying torches and headed toward Al-Hussein's tent. They walked around it a few times and tried to remove the crowds from the tent. The crowd tried to fight them. Then the knights burned Al-Hussein's tent, and people responded by chanting "*Ya Hussein… Ya Hussein*" (Oh Hussein… Oh Hussein). Fire devoured the tent in a few seconds. Few people tried to save it but in vain. The tent disappeared as well as the knights in red clothes. In emotional moments like these, they could become a target for the crowd that could hurt them.

The audience plays the role of the enemies and of mourning Imam Al-Hussein. The response of the audience bears double roles; first, their participation as actual actors by plundering Al-Hussein's camp comes to confirm what really happened in Karbala battle. The audience in the passion play seems to have broken the imaginary "fourth wall" in theater. It seems to have an actor who is an audience simultaneously and that becomes an essential component in the staging. Second, the participants made sure they would have remains from the tents to keep, because they believe these pieces have some distinguished sacred power and are able to assist them in achieving some of their long waited wishes.

Tent burning rebuilds and strengthens the main concepts of the Karbala battle. It is the conflict between the good camp represented by Al-Hussein who died defending his values, and the evil camp lead by the Umayyad leader, Omar bin Saad. This ritual relates the historic events in a live visual way which makes the

Karbala battle deep- rooted in the participants' memory and passion. Additionally, this ritual provides participants with a chance to return to the original time of the Karbala battle events and be part of them, especially for women who find it an opportunity to participate and they come early to book a suitable place.

After burning the tents, visitors start returning to their homes. Karbala residents continue with some other celebrations like candle procession in the night of estrangement, which is held on *Muharram* 10th to commemorate Al-Hussein's martyrdom and his family's captivity. Men, women and children participate in this procession carrying candles and repeating chants of passionate elegies. The procession starts from the Husseinite camp and passes through the Karbala roads and some historic site of the battle like *Altil Al Zainabi* (Zainabite Hill) which is the place where Zainab, Al-Husssein's sister, stood during the Karbala battle, the sacred place of the (two cut hands) where Al-Abbas' hands were cut in the battle, Al-Hussein's Shrine, and Abbas' shrine.

G. Burial Day (*Yawm Al-Dafn*)

On *Muharram* 13th, some Iraqi tribes organized a procession for the occasion of the third day since Al-Hussein's death or what is locally called *Yawm Al-Dafn*. It refers to the day Al-Hussein's body was buried after three days from his death.[260] According to a few historic references, women from Karbala's tribe of Beni Asad found the bodies of Al-Hussein and his family members in the battle field and returned to their tribe and insisted that their tribe bury the bodies. Their tribe was reluctant to do the burial for fear of the Umayyad punishment. The

[260] Abd Al- Razaq Mohammed Al-Moqarrim, *Makhtal Al Hussein*, 5th ed., (Beirut: Dar Alkutub Alislamiya, 1979) 319.

women in this ritual represent their role that they play in the burial. It is a way for women to really claim the reality of humanity. The women did not think about the dangers that they faced from the enemy, as much as focusing on the burial that reflects compassion towards other human beings.

Thousands of the Beni Asad women along with other women from Karbala participated in the procession to commemorate the burial of Karbala martyrs. Other processions joined Beni Asaad women like Beni Asaad men and other tribes to practice mourning rituals and *latm* in city streets. Passing through the Qibleh Street, which leads them to Al-Hussein's shrine, and then follow to Al-Abbas' shrine. The rituals of burial mark the end of '*Ashurā* rituals in *Muharram*. On *Safar* 20th, *Al-Arb'ain* visitation is scheduled to take place 40 days after Al-Hussein and his family's death in the Karbala battle.

H. Conclusion

'Ashurā rituals are practiced by Iraq Shi'a every year. They are a distinctive feature of the Shi'a Iraqi community. They help mourners to bring change to their social status. After the rituals, each individual would enjoy a distinctive social status. These changes in the status, as I mentioned before, vary from spiritual, economic, and social. These rituals contribute to reinvigorate the main sacred symbols of the Shi'a Islam represented by the prophet and his family, strengthens the relationship between the participants of the rituals and these symbols, and renews pledge and loyalty. By practicing these rituals, the religious experience is reproduced and rendered into a socio-cultural framework that contributes to

establishing social identity within the general and broader context of the Iraqi identity.

The Shi'a sacred shrines, especially in Karbala, play a significant role in producing and supporting the social identity in addition to granting the religious authorities the capacity to have an impact on social, political, and economic aspects of the society. *'Ashurā* rituals are general for most Iraqi Shi'a. They provide an opportunity to study the community through analyzing various spiritual or material symbols abundant in these rituals. Some of these rituals function as a link between participants and the hypothetical time in which they participate to symbolically reformulate an alternative history. This creates a feeling of satisfaction, psychological relief, serenity and strength due to being close to their main sacred religious symbols that, they believe, have the power to protect them and help them to realize their desires.

The symbols used in *'Ashurā* are the most important medium through which one could comprehend the different messages these rituals try to pass on to others. The mourning rituals in *'Ashurā* like lamenting, *latm*, *zangeel*, lacerating, passion play, and *Tweareej* Run are not daily activities for the participants and consequently cannot be understood without knowing the symbols used in them and out of their broader context. Rituals in general, and especially in *'Ashurā*, use the language of symbols outside the usual linguistic contexts to express the essence of the ritual, which is usually another event outside the familiar reality of Iraqi Shi'a.

Chapter 5

DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS OF VISITATION OF *AL-ARB'AIN* (*ZIYRAT AL-ARB'AIN*)

A. Introduction

Visitation of *Al-Arb'ain* indicates the visit to Al-Hussein's shrine on *Safar* 20 A.H. every Islamic year, 40 days after the anniversary of Al-Hussein's martyrdom. Iraqi Shi'a also call *Al-Arb'ain* "the Return of the Head" (*Maradd Al-Ras*), because they believe Al-Hussein's head was returned to Karbala on this day and buried with the body 40 days after his martyrdom. This visitation is second only to *'Ashurā* rituals, but attracts more participants. A large number of Iraqi Shi'a walk to Al-Hussein's shrine for visiting and blessing on the occasion in a journey that lasts days or weeks and includes some special rituals. In addition to that, during visitation rituals, Al-Hussein's shrine becomes a center that attracts visitors from all over Iraq and other countries.

Visitation of *Al-Arb'ain* is a kind of pilgrimage to a sacred place (Karbala) to express piety and loyalty to one of their main religious symbols (Al-Hussein). *Al-Arb'ain* is not considered *Hajj* because *Hajj* refers to a pilgrimage performed by Muslims to Mecca only during *Thu Al-Hujja,* the twelfth month in the Islamic calendar. *Hajj* is the fifth pillar of Sunni Islam, and the fifth branch (*Furuaa Al-Deen*) of ritual practice (*Ibadat*) of Shi'a Islam.[261] *Hajj* should be performed by

[261] For more details about *Hajj* in Shi'a Islam see: Mohammed Al-Hussein Kashif Al-Ghita, *Asl Al-Shi'a Wa-Usolaha: Mokaranah Ma Al-Matheaheb Al-Arba'a*, 1st ed., (Beirut: Dar Al-Adwa, 1990) 133, 183; Moojan Momen, *An Introduction to Shii Islam*, (New Haven: Yale UP, 1985) 172; Muhammad Rida Al-Muzaffar, *The Faith of Shi'a Islam*, 5th ed., (Qum: Ansariyan Publications, 2005) 2.

Muslims at least once in their life time, if they can physically and financially afford it. As for *ziyara* for Shi'a, it means a journey to a sacred or important shrine like the graves of prophets, imams and companions. There is a clear distinction that draws the Shi'a when deciding between performing *Hajj* or *ziyara*. An individual who visits Mecca and performs *Hajj* rituals is called *Hajje* for a male and *Hajjeyah* for a female, while the one who visits the Prophet's and Imams' shrine is *Zayer* for a male and *Zayerah* for a female.[262] Each enjoys relevant social status in his social surroundings.

The significant relation between structuralism and communitas could provide us with an important and useful approach to study the Visitation of *Al-Arb'ain*. Social relations and links play an important role for Shi'a in the Visitation of *Al-Arb'ain* as a reflection between their social status as an undefined communitas and the general structure of Iraqi society. During Visitation of *Al-Arb'ain*, as is the case with any pilgrimage, the style of collective expression practiced by participants surfaces as the most important factor that this ritual manifests through. Externally, *ziyara* reflects the unity of individuals and cohesion within the Shi'a community, while internally it focuses on the formation of Shi'a groups and their ability to be different and capable of practicing authority and control.

Nonetheless, Victor Turner distinguishes three levels of communitas so decisive in creating social links in pilgrimage. These levels can be seen in the Visitation of *Al-Arb'ain* and form an important feature in these rituals. These suggested levels of communitas are appropriate to study the Visitation of *Al-*

[262] In Iran, the individual who visits the Imam Al-Hussein's shrine is called *karbalaee.*

Arb'ain because the three levels that Turner studied can also be seen through *Al-Arb'ain.* The three levels of communitas are:

First, the existential or spontaneous communitas: In this level, total direct confrontation of human identities occurs. This generates in its subject an inclination that humanity is homogenous, unorganized (unstructured) and make up of free groups that express themselves in a social style which manifests their solidarity through feelings of unity and harmony within them.[263] In the Visitation of *Al-Arb'ain*, solidarity and joint feelings of belonging are some of the most important characteristics reflected by the crowds of participants in rituals of Visitation of *Al-Arb'ain*. The participants, being from all over Iraq, assist in producing and supporting Shi'a existence. Additionally, local and geographic boundaries disappear amongst various Shi'a groups especially those performing walking the long journey together and facing the same difficulties. They rediscover their space jointly, as well.

Second, the normative communitas: They are the ones that need mobilization and organization of resources to keep their participants alive and flourishing. They seek social dominance amongst members to succeed in their collective goals.[264] These social groups express their existence by founding a kind of social link amongst them during the Visitation of *Al-Arb'ain* to crystallize their power of social presence to activate their social dominance and members' status. During the processions of Al-Hussein (*Al-Mawakib Al-Husseiniyya*), many of these groups seek to establish their relationship with the visitors and to maintain the

[263] Victor Turner, *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors*, (New York: Cornell UP, 1975) 169.
[264] Turner 169.

relationship by periodically offering assistance and services to them, like food, drink, bedding, and health care.

Third, the ideological communitas: It could apply to various utopian groups of those faithful who in their authors to find the best circumstances for the communitas.[265] The most important individuals in this group are the religious leaders whose teachings and recommendations are binding and inevitable for group members. This group becomes noticeable during Visitation of *Al-Arb'ain* through the teachings and constructions that spread along roads and are printed in the form of small booklets distributed by their agents and followers to participants in the journey of the visitation. Some of these groups seek to spread their thoughts and ideological concepts as the most capable of achieving the successful solutions for Shi'a and that their religious leaders' thoughts should reach the largest number of participants possible to make wide use of them.

Visitation of *Al-Arb'ain* reflects many important aspects of Iraqi Shi'a. It reveals the system of social unity amongst the many Shi'a and consequently helps show this group's strength and helps the group to maintain its own identity amongst others. Collective spirit, prevalent during rituals, plays a decisive role in consolidating participants' social organization and crystallizing their social values. Additionally, individual participants hope to make important changes to their status by participating in the pilgrimage especially the through the esteemed spiritual and materialistic purification believed to take place in the process. Walking to Karbala is considered in the *Al-Arb'ain* visitation as a journey of

[265] Turner 169.

exploring the self and others, and an attempt to know the place and the individuals outside the participants' local environment. The visit also reflects the spiritual importance of Karbala for participants and also the role played by the religious institution when directing and controlling the events, being considered as a center for all ritual activities and Visitation of *Al-Arb'ain.*

B. Walking to Karbala

Walking is what distinguishes the Visitation of *Al-Arb'ain* from other Shi'a visits in Iraq. Although the visitation date is *Safar* 20th (the second month in the Islamic calendar), groups of walkers (*Mashaya)* to Karbala set off weeks ahead of time. They take into consideration any possible delays like tense traffic jam or stampeding, that could prevent them from reaching their common goal; Karbala. Because of the small size of Karbala, a city which could not host the millions of visitors at once, those who arrive before the 40th day perform the rituals of the Visitation of *Al-Arb'ain* early and return back to their home city to make room for others. The city receives millions of visitors, arriving and leaving, within two weeks before the 40th day. Thus, the number of pilgrims attending the Visitation of *Al-Arb'ain* in 1433 A.H.-2012 C.E. reached more than 17.5 million Iraqis (about 56% out of the current population of 31 million in Iraq), and 300,000 visitors from other countries; which is the number of participants in the Visitation of *Al-Arb'ain* for two weeks until the 40th day.[266] As for the numbers that actually participate on the 40th day in Karbala, it is less than that because the city could not accommodate more than two million visitors at a given time.

[266] Uthman Al-Ghanemi. "Security Operation Plan for Ziyarat *Al- Arb'ain*." Al Hurra Iraq News, 14 Jan. 2012 .

1. The First Day: *Safar* 15, 1433 A.H (January 9, 2012 C.E.)

We set out from Al- Baladiyat quarter Baghdad. I, with my two assistants, took the bus to join the walking visitors from Imam Ali's Shrine in Najaf. The reason I chose Najaf is the diverse backgrounds of walkers who usually take this route to Karbala. Visitors who use this route are from Najaf, Samawa, Basra, Nasiriya, and Umara (all in southern Iraq), North Iraqi cities, and foreign visitors. They all use the Najaf-Karbala road which makes it very crowded during the Visitation of *Al-Arb'ain*. In spite of the fact that there are three main roads visitors take to walk; Najaf -Karbala, Hilla-Karbala, and Baghdad-Karbala (see table 1). The Najaf-Karbala road is especially meaningful because of the historic depth it offers for walkers- I will mention more about this later on in this chapter- in addition to the symbolic dimension achieved by visiting the first Imam of the Shi'a and Al-Hussein's father, Ali bin Abi Talib and making it a point of departure to Karbala.

The passengers on our bus were all Shi'a going to visit Imam Ali's shrine traveling from Baghdad to Najaf (160 km south of Baghdad). It is the same road leading to Karbala but they diverge midway. On both sides of the road, there were huge numbers of walkers heading to Karbala on the Baghdad-Karbala route. Some carried Husseinite flags; other wore white shrouds as a sign indicating their readiness to die on such a journey. Women wore traditional black cloaks and put green bands on their heads and some of them carried green flags as well. At a military check- point with many vehicles and a few soldiers, the raid was blocked

to give space for walkers. Our bus took a side road in Dawra City (south west of Baghdad), which suffered from security problems.

Table 1: The Distance between Karbala (in km) and Other Cities that Visitors Walk From.

City	Distance to Karbala (km)
Hilla	45
Najaf	83
Baghdad	103
Diwaniyah	125
Wasit	133
Al Anbar	145
Diyala	160
Samawa	214
Samarra	231
Nasiriya	315
Umara	355
Kirkuk	369
Sulaymaniyah	407
Irbil	459
Mosul	487
Basra	490
Dahuk	566

Source: This table was made by the author.

The bus took a route through an agricultural area in Howr Rijeb, inhabited by a Sunni majority and witnessed violence in the last few years as my assistants mentioned. A great number of soldiers and policemen were spread on both sides of the road accompanied by armed local civilians called *Abna Al- Sahawat* (revival people). The city seemed different from other areas in Baghdad; no Husseinite flags or posters, no processions, no loudspeakers. There were no tents or processions of Al-Hussein. It was a city with no signs of Shi'a mourning rituals. Sunnis do not celebrate *'Ashurā* nor the Visitation of *Al-Arb'ain* and if it happens, it is a matter of courtesy and expression of political mobilization. For

example, during the Great Iraqi Revolution of 1920 (*Thorat Al- Ashreen*) against the occupation of Great Britain to the country, the Shi'a alongside with the Sunni, wanted to express their unity, as a response to their nationality challenges. So for that reason, the Sunni participated in the same rituals as the Shi'a in their mosques. At the same time, Shi'a participated in the Sunni rituals in their mosques as well.[267] Actually, there was one of these *mawakib* at the road at Howr Rijeb. The *mawkib* was on the side of the road close to a military check point. It was a big tent with flags on its top and loudspeakers for *latmiya*. Nearby, many men gathered drinking tea close to a signboard that read "Tribes of Al-Dulaim's *Mawakib*," which is one of the big Sunni tribes in Iraq.

Because of the road closure, the best way to drive is through Sunni areas because they are not used by walkers. Though, they are open for vehicles carrying Shi'a visitors. Roads used by walkers are usually closed. Along highways, armed military vehicles were spread. Service *mawakib* put tents on both sides of the road to offer food and drinks to visitors. Our bus, playing Husseinite elegies since we set out, turned to a narrow road crossing Al-Neel town Babylon governorate, then to a one sided unpaved village road because of the previous collision of two oil tankers. The road which was on a bank of a little river could fit only one car. It seemed to be used by the villagers only. Suddenly, a group of young boys appeared from the trees carrying loaves of bread and palm dates, and asked drivers to stop to eat. Then our bus reached Al-Kifil, 30 km away from Najaf. That was when the bus stopped and the passengers were asked to stop at a service

[267] Eric Davis, *Memories of State: Politics, History, and Collective Identity in Modern Iraq*, (London: University of California Press, 2005) 47.

mawkib to have lunch. They made the driver take an oath by Al-Hussein's love to do so. After a short stop for free food and tea, we continued our journey until Najaf where Ali's shrine is. We arrived there by midday. The journey took four hours for 160 km because of traffic jams and security-related road closures.

We started walking with others from Imam Ali's shrine on a road that cut through the biggest Shi'a cemetery *(Wadi Al-Salam)* to reach the road that leads to Karbala (see photograph 5).

Photograph 5: Visitors (*Mashaya*) walking on the Najaf-Karbala road.

Thousands of walkers moved rapidly carrying Husseinite flags whose bearers made sure to wipe them by Ali's shrine to gain symbolic sacredness for their upcoming journey. On both sides of the road stood sellers of Husseinite flags and sandals which were designed for walking long distances because of their light weight and quality of material. Walkers preferred using these sandals, instead of many other brands.

We walked on an unpaved side road before reaching the main road which was getting more crowded because other walkers joined in from other side roads. The Karbala bound side of the road was closed for walkers' use only, while the other side of the road was used for cars leaving Karbala.

From the start of the road, electricity posts were numbered; number one was in Najaf and number 1457 was at Al-Hussein's shrine representing a total distance of 83 km. This method of numbering was used to guide walkers and to inform them of what remains of the road to Karbala.

Walkers (*mashaya)* walked with quick steps through service *mawakib* spread on both sides of the road. After a few kilometers, we saw passion play *tashabih* walking amongst crowds. It was composed of children carrying long spears ended with plastic slaughtered heads banded in green stripes, followed by a group of children in green clothes. Their hands were tied with a rope held by a man in red and yellow clothes. Close to them, a group of men were waving their swords in the air. One man with long blond hair was acting like he was flogging the children, to show how the kids were treated in the actual event. This passion play procession walks with other groups of walkers without stopping. This is to reenact

a scene of Al-Hussein's family in captivity by the Umayyad army after Al-Hussein's martyrdom and the hanging his and his companions' heads on spears for revenge and as a way of frightening others. One could recognize Al-Hussein's family from their green clothes, while Umayyad soldiers were in red clothes. The man with long blond hair was Shimr bin Thil-Jawshan, Al-Hussein's killer. The long and blond hair of Shimr bin Thil-Jawshan, signifies an important meaning in this play. Historically, there is no source to indicate that Shimr bin Thil-Jawshan had this kind of hair. In addition, the region of Iraq is not familiar with long blond hair, since most people have dark hair. It may be used to represent the significance of that Shimr bin Thil-Jawshan as a negative character who is symbolically foreign to this particular region. First, he rebelled against the Arab Islamic traditions, since he killed the grandson of the prophet. Second, he offended the Arabic rules. He did not value the rule of respecting the women and children of Imam Al-Hussein's family, and instead he mistreated them by burning their tents and abusing the family. For these reasons, it is probably an attempt on the part of the actors to show that someone this negative would not be from this region, and thus give him characteristics that are foreign to it.

In another place, another procession was displaying mannequins of cloth and leather stuffed with other materials, which depicted another side of the Karbala battle. Al-Hussein appeared dying on the ground, while hugging his child as blood covered the white and green clothes. Meanwhile, there was a woman who was wrapped in black, with her hands on her head; Zainab, Al-Hussein's sister, was reciting elegies for her killed brother. Others appeared killed to represent some of

the murdered family members of Al-Hussein. All mannequins were in glass displays on the side of the road. Women stopped and put money in the glass displays, while tying green strips close to the mannequins as symbols of their pledges to achieve their wishes and hopes (see photograph 6).

Photograph 6: Women mourning and placing money in displays.

When the sun was about to set, a few people stood amid the road and asked walkers to spend the night in their *mawakib*. Others asked walkers to join them in their homes to host them in the most proper way. The number of walkers decreased gradually because they started to stop for the night in a *mawkib* or a close by house before it was too cold and dark. When we reached Al-Karama quarter, a young man seized my arm and said, "You and your friends are my guests, allow me to serve you for the night." My assistants signaled to accept the

offer, which I did. We left the main road and turned onto a side one where we and other walkers were given a lift to his house, 3 km away from the main road, by the young man whose name was Sayid Basim with other walkers to his home.

We arrived at the young man's home. His father (Sayid Jasim Al- Musawy) received us and said, "Welcome, visitor of Sajjad's father (Imam Al-Hussein)...Welcome visitors of Al-Hussein." We were taken to the guest room and Sayid Basim excused himself to bring more visitors, and in a few minutes, we were ten people. Our host, Sayid Jasim, was a kind man in his 60s, and his family's line traces back to the Prophet Mohammed. *Saddah*[268] are usually treated with massive respect in Shi'a society and they are titled with Sayid before their names. Sayid Jasim said, "Forgive us for our boiler is not working because there is no power, we will warm some water up on gas for you to wash up." Then he commanded us, "Take off your socks, I will wash them myself." By washing Al-Hussein's visitors' socks he would acquire more honor. Although he explained that his deed would be nothing compared to the honor acquired by those who would continue walking to Al-Hussein's shrine. After serving us dinner, tea, and cigarettes, Sayid Jasim started telling us stories as an attempt to entertain us to fulfill his duty as our host. That is what he did with two groups of visitors he had hosted before us.

Exhaustion was clearly visible on some walkers' faces. They asked for medical sterilizers and cotton to treat their injured feet. There were three young men who had walked twelve days from Basra to perform the Visitation of *Al-*

[268] *Saddah* is plural, and the singular form is Sayid. It refers to the Prophet Mohammed's male descendent, while the female is called *Aalwiya*. *Saddah* is similar to *Al-Ashraf* in Sunni Islam.

Arb'ain for the fifth time. The other four, who were from Samawa, had walked for four days. Another one was from Kufa, and had started walking the same day. Before sleeping, I asked some of them about their reasons for walking. A young man from Basra said, "Someone is looking for me to blow me up because I love Al-Hussein. I am not afraid of anyone. I walk in defiance of this terrorist and others to blow me up for Al-Hussein's love. I am not afraid of terrorism." He was referring to a gory explosion from terrorists that had occurred when he and his friends were passing Al Batt-ha in Nasiriya a few days earlier.

The government's role during the Visitation of *Al-Arb'ain* is restricted to providing safety to visitors which is not an easy job because of recurrent terrorist attacks against Iraqi civilians since 2003. Army and local police troops protect visitors of Karbala while federal troops provide safety to cities nearby. A few days before the Visitation of *Al-Arb'ain*, roads leading to Al-Hussein's shrine are closed, then later on, all roads are closed due to the increasing numbers of visitors who arrive to Karbala. During my stay in Iraq, these security measures did not prevent explosions against *mawakib* or participants in walking rituals. A suicide bomber blew himself up amongst crowds of walkers in Al Batt-ha in Nasiriya killing 44 and injuring 81.[269] In addition, Baghdad and Hilla and other cities are facing many explosions targeting crowds of visitors walking to Karbala.

The first day was eventful, some of the details of which would be repeated in the upcoming days, while others would disappear. *Tashabih* and statues along the walking route are attempts for the organizers to crystallize the Karbala battle

[269] Hazim Mohammed Habib, "Hadithat Al Batt-ha," *Saheefat Alsabah,* 2431 (2012):1.

around the sentiments of the visitors of Al-Hussein. These *tashabih*, same as the one we saw in *'Ashurā,* seek to accompany the walkers in order to keep the tragic scene alive and present, and to let participants take part in it, even if symbolically. This would have massive impact on the participants and preserve an effective relationship between the participants and the rituals. This could be noticed with women who deal with *tashabih* as essential symbols that are capable of interacting with their emotions and responding to their various wishes and hopes. Anything, big or small could be of high importance in these rituals. That is why walkers understand the signs and symbols from their main symbols *Ahlul bayt* (the Prophet and his family) coming to them directly or indirectly from the Prophet, which makes them alert to dealing with these symbols suitably. This gives them a sacred reality and hence requires a Prophet's handling.

Many visitors would reflect some of their values and social background during the rituals. Generosity toward guests, feeding them and making sure they are well rested are some of the most important social values for most of the Iraqi tribes. It is by these and other values that Iraqi tribes and their members acquire their status and social importance amongst other tribes through performing these values according to the tribe. An individual's fame as a generous person signifies his high social prestige to other people and contrary to that an ungenerous person would bring shame to himself and his tribe. The case becomes more important when it is about being generous to Al-Hussein's visitors where it is not only a social value but also a religious one at the same time.

Under the roof of our generous host, we went to sleep early about 9:00 PM and woke up to the sound of Sayid Jasim's *Athan* (call to prayer) for morning prayers at 5:30 AM. We were served our breakfast and tea, and then said farewell to Sayid Jasim and thanked him. Sayid Basim drove us to the exact place where he had picked us up from the road to Karbala.

2. The Second Day: *Safar* 16, 1433 A.H. (January 10, 2012 C.E.)

All men and women were walking vigorously. It was 6:00 AM and everyone could still easily walk on the Karbala road. But in two hours, it would be difficult to walk due to the heavy jam, especially for women who were pushing prams and people with disabilities who were accompanied by their family members to assist. *Mawakib* and tents were lined up one next to the other. A big number of them carried tribes' names, which sponsored these *mawakib*. Others carried different names like *mawkib* of students, or *Husseiniyat* under various names of famous people of Iraqi Shi'a, like Sheikh Ahmed Al-Waely (died 2003), one of the most famous reciters in Husseinite *majalis.*

Husseinite flags of red, black, yellow, and green colors were spread along both sides of the road. All kinds of banners and posters were hung in tents and power posts. Some of these signify Al-Hussein's role in the Karbala battle and others are just slogans, commandments, or stands whose sponsors' names were written underneath them. Some banners were not attributed to anyone. For example one read: We, Husseinite, our women are Zainabite, do not wear makeup before foreigners (*Nahnoo Al-Husseiniyoon, nisaona Zainabiyat, la yatebarajen amam alajnby*). Some banners expose contradiction between their sponsors and

what is written on them. One banner read, "Dear sister visitor, be a Zainabite in your *hijab* during visitation," sponsored by the Najaf pharmacist trade union, though the sponsoring party does not have anything to do with religious or ethical aspects since its job is to provide medical care only. Apart from that there were many slogans on both sides of the road that intermingle religion with political or ethical affairs. This event shows how religion along with culture, politics, and ethics combine together. It is very difficult to differentiate between them. This occurs because what Turner mentioned, existential communitas. It is the confrontation of Shi'a groups, where they feel homogenous and try to represent themselves as one unit, with one social style and same cultural and political thoughts. These feelings of solidarity are always seen in these huge events. Walkers follow this pattern as well. They raise slogans; printed on their bags or clothes that express their Shi'a background and their destination. Some walkers carried Iraqi flags, and Bahrain's too, in solidarity with the Shi'a there in their recent upheaval. The route looked like a carnival of signs and symbols that offer many meanings of participants' thoughts and wishes. In this event, some Shi'a of Bahrain who are participating in this event feel that they are part of the Shi'a community in general. At the same time, they are trying to receive support from all the Shi'a who are also participating in this event. Most of the Shi'a in *Al-Arb'ain* believe they are Shi'a before their nationality.[270]

The road might seem as a huge exhibition for various slogans, and a site of concurrence of the political, religious, economic, and social issues. In one

[270] Most individuals that I met as I was walking identified themselves as Shi'a, before their nationality.

moment, one might find next to them an outdoor exhibition of old pictures of sacred shrines, and the next by known religious leader walking to visit Al-Hussein. One would, for a while, see a huge banner that read "Sign to help Imam Al-Hussein enter into the Guinness Book," then you would see tens of walkers in front of a hundred meter long paper to write their names, wishes, and signatures. This paper would be hung by its sponsors at the area amid the two shrines, and then sent to London to register it as the longest petition. Not too far away, a mobile company offered free calls and had a banner that read "We welcome Al-Hussein's visitors." Then appeared a person who distributed booklets and newsletters on religious teachings and *fatwas* about relevant issues to visitation, how to deal with various things on the way of walking, and what visitors should read in the Visitation of *Al-Arb'ain*. There are organizations or religious institutions that publish these booklets with pictures of the religious leaders or *Ulama* on them, or the authorized publisher, and distribute them to the walkers.

These groups are considered as "ideological communitas" that perform intensive activity during the Visitation of *Al-Arb'ain*. Religious leaders' followers seek to crystallize their religious leader's thoughts and widely spread them, and to stress the role of a leader and his ability to tackle various realistic and religious perils individuals might face. These followers also seek to strengthen the ties between their references and the participants. To achieve this, the references share the practice of the same rituals with all humility. Their images, names and books might, by repetition, attract participants' attention and eventually they adopt their thoughts.

After having had lunch at a *mawkib* and rested for a while, we resumed walking. Then we were surprised by a stampede occurring around a Shi'a religious man. In a few seconds, more crowds surrounded this man. He could not continue walking. Everyone wanted to shake his hands, which caused a massive jam. One of his guards needed to ask the crowd to be quiet and give space for the sheikh to continue walking, along other walkers to Karbala. This was Sheikh Jaafar Al- Ibrahimy, one of the most famous Husseinite reciters in the recent years. His *majlis* is usually broadcasted on TV. I attended one of his *majalis* in the Jamileh quarter, east of Baghdad, during *Muharram*.

Women participate widely in rituals of walking. Sometimes, they outnumber men. Women are usually accompanied by their families, while groups of only women assisted each other in taking care of children or carrying their luggage. Women stop to watch *tashabih* frequently. They stand in front of a picture or a statute of Al-Hussein's blood-stained white horse and caress it. They also try to caress any statue or image of Al-Hussein or Al-Abbas and then wipe their faces. Most of the time, they take out money and put it next to those statues or images. This money is considered as confirmation as the vow (*nadhr)* to realize their desires. The doll of the slaughtered child Abdullah in his bed and Al-Hussein's horse attracts the most attention from women. Amongst women, there was one who was leading a ram to Karbala to slaughter it there and feed visitors on it as a vow she made for Al-Hussein.

The more we walked toward Karbala, the fewer residential quarters and towns there were, and the more processions of service (*Mawakib Al-Khidmah*) were

offering their assistance on this and other roads. These *mawakib* acquire official licenses by registering their names and places of services at The Department of Husseinite *Mawakib* and Committees in Iraq and Islamic World from *Muharram* 25 to *Safar* 10. The number of those who registered their *mawakib* reached about 18,000 all over Iraq.[271]

Mostly, one or more tents or more are set up in the sight of the *mawakib*, where necessary requirements are items like kitchen utensils. Tents are also used to shelter and sleep the service providers. *Mawakib* are not required to offer their services to their own cities but at any place they choose. There were hundreds of these service *mawakib* that came from Baghdad, Basra, Umara, and Nasiriya to offer their services to the visitors on the Najaf-Karabala route.

The members in the service *mawakib* are in charge of providing food, drinks, bedding and other services free to visitors. They are also bound by security measures. Organizers of *mawakib* make sure that their expenses come from donations from individual members of the *mawkib*, merchants and social figures. Most of these *mawakib* prefer not taking money from any political party because they believe these *mawakib* are religious and unrelated to politics, besides most visitors would not like mixing politics with their visitation.[272] *Mawakib* also refuse accepting money from undeclared individuals or groups because that would obscure the donors' intentions as they do not look for political rewards, fame, or material benefits. They should rather be looking only for Al-Hussein's blessing and intercession. Most Iraqi tribes financially support a *mawakib* that carry their

[271] Hashim Al- Musawy, Private interview, 3 Jan. 2012.
[272] Processions that were related to religious parties got fewer visitors and participants than processions that do not have any particular political background.

names either through home towns or other places. Some towns and villages support their *mawakib,* carrying their names, too.

Although large service *mawakib* find sponsoring bodies, as merchants and other rich individuals, or a prominent person to financially support them, small ones comprised of a number of people depending on their own donations. Most of these people work in the private sector and save money monthly in a box called "Al-Hussein's Box". In *'Ashurā* and *Al-Arb'ain* they use this money to spend on services of food, drinks, and bedding provided to the visitors and they stress that they do not receive any money from anyone. They say their support comes from Al-Hussein only.[273] Hence, the members of small service *mawakib* want nothing but blessings from Al-Hussein as a reward for servicing his visitors.

Processions of service differ according to the types of service they provide. Most service *mawakib* focus on provision of food, drinks, and bedding all day long (see photograph 7). *Mawakib* close by would coordinate the times of meals. Cooks in the *mawakib* show their talent to offer delicious food that could attract a larger number of Al-Hussein's visitors. Organizers of *mawakib* usually stand in the middle of the road to humbly ask those to head to their *mawkib* to have food and drinks. Members of a *mawkib* would carry plates to give to the walkers who wish to continue walking. Others offer water and desserts for children. Most *mawakib* offer a wide variety of beverages, hot and cold, nonstop like tea, sour tea, cinnamon tea, coffee, juices and others. They call visitors by *Zayer* for a male

[273] Abbas Hardan, Private interview, 5 Dec. 2012.

and *Zayrah* for a female, which is a term used to call visitors of sacred shrines. Any visitor could be called by that title regardless of knowing their real names.

Photograph 7: A service procession preparing food for the visitors.

Many *mawakib* offer bedding, especially in areas where walkers come from distant cities to fill in for hotels. *Mawakib* offer bedding service in different ways; walkers might be taken to spend a night at a *mawkib* member who lives nearby. Other *mawakib* set up massive tents, some for women's bedding and others for men. Many *Husseiniyat* are built on both sides of the roads and are used for bedding and other services. Bedding services, though offered in a very simple way, are sufficient. Sleeping under a roof, having a pillow and cover, protection, dinner, drinks, a charger for one's mobile, and warm breakfast with tea or coffee for free is a great deal in an area where hotels do not even exist. It is luxurious,

and an invaluable service in semi-agricultural areas or arid ones on very cold nights.[274]

The services offered by the *mawakib* vary to meet the walkers' needs, but might include the provision of a mobile to call family, medical services, physiotherapy, and massage. Others offer qualitative services; one hangs a banner that read "*Mawkib* of the two severed hands' (Al-Abbas), shoe repairer, sewing, and fixing mobiles." There were ten young men sitting at a sewing machine, fixing visitors' shoes or clothes.[275] Not far away, another group of young men were dismantling cell phones to repair them. In another place, a group of women were baking bread in clay ovens. Visitors liked eating the bread fresh from the ovens. Some of these women were baking for more than a week. Other *mawakib* were offering massages and medical treatment for the blistered soles that resulted from walking long distances. Most *mawakib* provide information services, especially tracing missing people, as vast numbers of children accompany their parents, and they sometimes become separated from them or go astray due to the massive crowds. Most women wear black cloaks over their clothes which makes it difficult for their children to recognize them. A child could mistake any woman as his mother. Numbered electricity posts are a guide tool used by walkers and *mawakib* on this route.

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[274] This year's *Al-Arb'ain* was in the middle of the month of January, when the weather is very cold, especially in the uninhabited areas. The visitors would walk several kilometers before they encountered a small village, so therefore most visitors would stop walking before sunset.

[275] I talked with some young people who repair shoes and clothes and asked them for the cause of their choice for this service. They answered that they saw a need for a service like this and that there were not many other processions that offered this service. Although they did not have the prior experience for this work, they were eager to participate and provide this service for the visitors to Al-Hussein's shrine.

Service *mawakib* play an important role in the rituals of *Al-Arb'ain* as a kind of "normative communitas" when taken as an attempt to mobilize and organize selves and resources to preserve social existence. These *mawakib*, organized either by tribes, or quarters, or various groups, all seek to achieve a kind of social control. Tribes and residential quarters try to establish their social existence and support it by strengthening the relationship of their members, creating, and activating social links with visitors. These types of groups acquire others' admiration due to the importance, size of participation, and the role they play in their local environment.

Visitors play a great role in mobilizing themselves during *Al-Arb'ain* without relying on any government role neither in organizations nor services. Mostly, they succeed in organizing this visitation because of discipline of population and positive preparedness the participants show during visitation. The best evidence on this was when groups of participants showed their ability to organize themselves in *Al-Arb'ain* 2003.[276] The visitation date coincided with the fall of Saddam's regime on April 9, 2003. At that time, there was not any government or institution able to organize walking visitors. For the first time in their lives and upon their free will after the fall of regime, millions of visitors succeeded in practicing their rituals without assistance from the government or religious institutions. That brought on the motivation to continue their experience annually without the government support, though the current government is Shi'a. It is the wish of the population to keep these rituals independent from any government

[276] Vali Nasr, *The Shia Revival: How Conflicts within Islam Will Shape the Future*, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2006) 18-19.

intervention. This might have been caused by their suffering during the long years of the ban and the hindering of their practices and rituals by previous Iraqi governments.

After the increase in the number of terrorist attacks on Iraqis participating in various Shi'a rituals, apart from disturbances of general security and political situation in Iraq, it was difficult to organize these rituals without the intervention of the government or religious institutions. The role of the government was protection while the religious institution supervised and organized through the Department of Husseinite *Mawakib* and Committees in Iraq and Islamic World. The two sides coordinated to assist in the success of organizing the participants in the rituals especially that of Husseinite *mawakib* and committees.

The Department of Husseinite *Mawakib* and Commitees is attached to a general trust of Al-Hussein and Al-Abbas' shrines, and issues licenses for *mawakib* and people participating in the Visitation of *Al-Arb'ain*. The head of the *mawkib*, also known as the sponsor, submits an application after registering two assistants. It is required that the sponsor sign a written agreement and submit it to the Ministry of Interior stating that he agrees to be bound by the regulations and commands issued by general directorate of police (legal affairs). Some of these regulations and commands are to maintain security and order, not to carry guns, not use the *mawkib* to cause damage to any official or unofficial aspect, to remove the content of the *mawkib* after the completion of the rituals, and to care for the environment.

For *Al-Arb'ain* visitation of 2011, the Department of Husseinite *Mawakib* issued a statement of 22 items to regulate the visitation. These regulations had to be adhered to by all participants in *mawakib* and committees. Some of these state that prayers should be performed on time, no pictures of religious symbols should be raised or promoted. Others relate to maintaining the safety and security of the sacred places and participants. This section also issues the timing table for launching various mourning *mawakib* like *Mawakib* of Caravan, *Mawakib Zanjeel* and *Mawakib* of *Latm,* coming from various cities of Iraq. It also specifies the road *mawakib* should take and the duration of their rituals.

In the absence of a clear government role in the Visitation of *Al-Arb'ain* and bringing restrictions to security only, some religious and semi official bodies seek to enjoy a more important role. The Department of Husseinite *Mawakib* and Committees in Iraq and the Islamic World, stationed at Abbasid shrine, is religious foundation that plays a major role in organizing the visitation of *Al-Arb'ain* especially inside Karbala. This department is under government control but has its own independence as well. The funding comes from the Shi'a religious department called *Diwan Alwaqf Alsheai* (Bureau of Shi'a Endowment), which is responsible for Shi'a Mosques and holy shrines in Iraq.[277] The department is the only body that has the authority to grant and cancel licenses for *mawakib*. It also coordinates with security bodies to control *mawakib*, even those from outside Karbala. It also provides services to *mawakib* in Karbala with their free supplies. That includes two slaughtered animals for meat for each *mawkib*, rice, and other

[277] There is also the same bureau for Sunnis in Iraq, responsible for Sunni Mosques.

needs. It is in this way that Karbala gains another source of strength, adding to its sacred status. The department of rituals controls the rituals in '*Ashurā* and *Al-Arb'ain.*

Before sunset, we arrived at Al-Haidariya, midway to Karbala, a place known to visitors as Khan Al-Nuss. We decided to spend the night at one of the *Husseiniyat,* called *Husseiniyat Ansar Al-Taff*. The *Husseiniya* is a big hall that has 70 beds on the floor, and is supplied with electrical heaters. We were served dinner and hot drinks. A member of the *mawkib* was a doctor from Najaf and who offered first aid to those in need. I was one of those in need of first aid. The sole of my foot was full of blisters, so Dr. Faris performed a quick surgery and cleaned my foot from blisters.

3. The Third Day: *Safar* 17, 1433 A.H. (January 11, 2012 C.E.)

Though we set out early before sunrise, the road was full of walkers contrary to the last two days. We stopped for breakfast at a *mawkib*, where we were served eggs and broad beans, a famous Iraqi breakfast. One still could not see far because of darkness. Unintentionally, we found ourselves amongst a throng of walkers following a person carrying a big green flag waved up high, and making a sound with the flow of the cold wind. Some walkers were talking with each other, others were silent. Sometimes, it is all silence, then a short period of talking. The walkers' attentions, when silent, get attracted to the flapping flag. This scene makes walkers feel as if they are walking outside of place and time. Later, a member of the group told me that he did not feel the walking; instead he felt he

was flying and that Al-Hussein's flag was his wing with which he beat the air to arrive at Al-Hussein's shrine.

Walkers' numbers were increasing as we walked more. When we were about to leave Najaf, people seemed to be swaying in their spots because of the heavy crowd. For the first time, we saw large numbers of visitors walking the opposite direction; they finished their journey to Karbala, and they were returning home. But due to road closure by security forces, these early visitors needed to walk a longer distance on the return journey to reach a place where cars were allowed at the edges of Karbala. Some of these vehicles were trucks, military cars, or public buses; all mobilized to transport visitors to certain areas. Other visitors would change buses many times before reaching home to mark the end of a long hard journey.

On one side of the road, a group of men stood around a man in a circle. He was chanting *hosat*, plural of *hosa*, which are poems of tribes of the south of Iraq and the mid-Euphrates. They emphasize presenting the values of heroism, courage, and good virtues of the tribe or its members. They are usually chanted during fights, or elegies to the dead or to mobilize members of the tribe for a certain matter. As soon as the man finished his *hosa*, those surrounding him started repeating the last line he said many times while they were dancing in very expressive movements and in a circular motion. Three poets took turns while in the circle there were young and old men dancing and chanting. A poet recited a *hosa* praising sponsors and members of Husseinite *mawakib* for the services they offer to Al-Hussein's visitors (see photograph 8). The poem stated that big

mawakib sponsors' reward would be visitors praying for them when they would reach Karbala and visit Al-Hussein's shrine:

> Think of Al-Hussein's mourner, he even set up a tent
>
> Welcome, he shouted and received visitors on the road
>
> May your guest room be thriving, you who served Al-Hussein
>
> day and night
>
> We wished to be your guests for it was built with goodness
>
> For you, expressing words and their meaning become you
>
> We visit and pray for him
>
> The Zayer says, the Zayer.

Photograph 8: Visitors performing *hosa* on the side of the road.

Hosa, being a local ritual practiced by tribal groups, expresses tribal and local background. It seems the main function of *hosa* is not only to express the emotional status of individuals, but it is also a ritual, which according to Durkheim, elevates the vigor of the society.[278] In addition, the *hosa* performs the solidarity of the tribe as a whole.[279] It aims at strengthening their social relationships through connecting them to a common emotional and thought condition, which eventually leads to building their society. *Hosa*, same as other activities practiced by Iraqi Shi'a in *'Ashurā* and *Al-Arb'ain*, seek to deal with what religion is and interact with it, then reproduce it in a cultural framework that preserves the pure local spirit and features.

While walking, we heard different Arabic dialects, sometimes foreign languages; it was very diverse. There were a significant number of Iraqi Turkmen Shi'a who joined visitors to participate in walking to Karbala. They were from Mosul, Kirkuk and Dahuk (northern Iraq). They spoke Turkmen language with each other and Arabic with the rest of the visitors.[280] Those Turkmen walkers took buses from the north to Basra in the south, and started walking from there. Some of them started walking from Najaf. Non-Arab visitors were there as well like Kurds, and foreigners like Iranians, people from Bahrain and India, and Africans from Kenya and Tanzania. They all walked side by side with the rest of the walkers heading to Karbala. Most of them were wearing traditional dress.

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[278] Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, Trans. Joseph Ward Swain. (New York: Collier Books, 1961) 447.
[279] Robert A. Fernea, *Shaykh and Effendi: Changing Patterns of Authority Among the El Shaban of Southern Iraq,* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1970) 113.
[280] I asked a number of Iraqi Turkmen Shi'a walkers if they felt a difference from other walkers, and they answered no, that, they felt no difference. They identify themselves as Shi'a in the first place, and then Iraqi Turkmen.

From the time we started from Najaf, we had been listening to many poems and *latmiya* from loudspeakers. This helped visitors maintain a joint rhythm of walking. The most famous poem was from members of the service *mawakib* when they asked them to stop at their *mawkib* to be served for Al-Hussein because they are his visitors:

Welcome *Zayer*, welcome, Ali may help you

For walking to Karbala, Ali may help you

Have a drink of water from us

Sleep here and then resume walking the next day

We are Al-Hussein's servants, and servants for walkers

It's our honor to say Al-Hussein, for us, is the reward

Rest at ours for a while, *Zayer*; hang your flag

Until morning, a servant of us is awake to drink his water

His tea is cardamom, welcome *Zayer*

Have a sip of water, *Zayer*

Rest and tea is ready

Welcome *Zayer*, welcome, may Ali help you.

We also noticed that Husseinite poems and chants express their writers' wish by mixing religion with local culture to work the relationship between them. Although religious scholars (*Ulama*) prohibit singing and warn against chanting that resembles singing, most chanted poems on this occasion and others are similar to songs and rhythms used in happy occasions. This is normal because rhythm expresses its participants' and listeners' mood, and popular events have

famous rhythms well known to most participants. Words of poems are designed on a very big scale to fit the dominant popular culture. Consequently, complex religious thoughts become simple and are expressed in the language of daily life. Many of the chants are written in simple poetic words and popular rhythms which are famous and draw on popular songs, and are listened widely because they are related to religious and ideological significances justified, the religious occasion.

During rest or meal times, we had the opportunity to talk about visitation and walking under Saddam's regime with some walkers. Old men insisted they kept the rituals of walking to Karbala every year for *Al-Arb'ain* visitation, even during the years of prohibition and cruelty. The security authority was extremely harsh on walkers during the 1990s. Walkers used to be tortured then imprisoned for performing "a wrong religious practice."[281] These old men talked about alternate routes to the ones known to security forces to avoid being arrested by Baathists members or security agents spread along roads used by visitors to Karbala. On the other hand, villagers and farmers used to help walkers on those alternate routes. They started fires in fields as a guide for walkers, and left food and drinks next to these fires and disappeared to avoid arrest by security forces.

a. Confrontation of the Participants and Security Forces in 1977

The rituals of walking in *Al-Arb'ain* visitation have been practiced by visitors using the same current routes to reach Al-Hussein's shrine in Karbala before Saddam's era. The number of visitors was not as phenomenal as today, where

[281] One of the walkers I spoke to, named Abu Hussein (born in 1950), did the walk from the city of Samawa on the *Al-Arb'ain* visit to Karbala in 1996, but the security forces arrested him along with a group of walkers in an ambush at night on their way to Karbala. He told me that the court ruling "indicates that my crime was of wrong religious practice," and was sentenced to twelve months plus an extra month because he was holding a flag with him.

walking to Karbala attracts more participants one year after the other. A participant, Ihreiz Sachit Imaaeydi, (see photograph 9) who was born in 1927 and served at his father's service *mawkib*, close to Khan Al-Nuss, mentioned that he was offering service with his father to visitors on the Najaf-Karbala route at the same place where he was standing and that visitors used to come by foot or on horses since the mid 1940s.[282] And he added that the number of walkers has kept increasing till the famous clash between walkers and government armed forces happened in Khan Al-Nuss 1977. After that, walking visitors had to take side routes through villages and farm lands away from the highway and agents of security forces who wanted to arrest any walker to Karbala.

The confrontations of February 4-7, 1977 during *Al-Arb'ain* visitation was the first important clash between visitors' collective will and government security forces.[283] The Baathist party followed a policy of restriction on participants in Shi'a rituals after assuming power in 1968. In the early 1970s, the government imposed severe limitations on *mawakib* and their sponsors and used videoing for surveillance on participants' moves in various Shi'a rituals.[284]

In 1977, the Karbala local authority prohibited the rituals of *Al-Arb'ain* visitation in the governorate and cancelled all licenses to participating *mawakib.* That led to escalating the challenge for walkers who participated in bigger numbers in walking from Najaf to Al-Hussein's shrine on *Safar* 15, February 4,

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[282] I did a private interview on January 11, 2012 with Ihreiz Sachit Imaaeydi, who was born in 1927 and had been blind for several years, now. Near Khan Al-Nuss, he was involved in one of the processions service where he sat on a chair near the road, offering packs of cigarettes to visitors.
[283] Faleh A. Jabar, *The Shi'ite Movement in Iraq,* (London: Saqi Books, 2003) 198.
[284] Jabar 198.

1977.[285] Many clashes occurred between walkers and security forces in Khan Al Nuss, and then participants were besieged by government forces in Al Nakheleh (15 km away from Karbala). On February 6, visitors were besieged by tanks and armed forces supported by planes. The clashes finished after many visitors were killed or wounded and 30,000 participants were arrested. A number of them were executed after short trials.[286]

Photograph 9: Ihreiz Sachit Imaaeydi participating in service processions.

[285] Jabar 198.
[286] Ali Moamen, *Sanowat Aljamr*, 3rd ed., (Beirut: Almarkaz Al Islami Almaasir, 2004) 168.

The confrontation between walkers and security forces was the most important example of resistance practiced by Shi'a against the regime up to that date. The events of 1977 showed that the rituals of *Al-Arb'ain* visitation did not only have religious meanings for the participants, but they also held other significances such as the spirit of challenge, confrontation, and the consolidation of Shi'a collective identity against the persecution practiced by an authority of high Sunni majority. Walking to Karbala in *Al-Arb'ain* visitation was a kind of total confrontation between Iraqi Shi'a and the side that was different to them. The authority backed by Sunnis worked hard on strengthening its differences and animosity to Shi'a, as well as restricting, persecuting and banning their rituals which represented their most important connection with their main symbols. Consequently, the rituals of walking to Karbala have become an endeavor for expressing the unity and harmony of Iraqi local Shi'a groups from all over Iraq.

On the way to Karbala, the best time for walking is during the early hours of the day. The distance walked in the first four hours equals all that is walked for the rest of the day because of exhaustion and heavily populated roads. Walkers walk silently. Some read invocations from booklets they carry with them. Others recite short prayers and count them on the rosary *(sibha).* At the end of the third day, blisters filled my feet, so I stopped at a medical squad that cleaned my feet. I would be able to walk tomorrow in a better way now that we were 20 km away from Karbala. We were expected to reach Karbala the next day around noon.

4. The Fourth Day: *Safar* 18, 1433 A.H. (January 12, 2012 C.E.)

As in the previous days, crowds of walkers set out early morning toward Karbala while morning invocations were heard from loudspeakers and soon became a rhythm that walkers followed. Signs of happiness and serenity were apparent on visitors' faces because they were about to reach their destination. They could arrive at Al-Hussein's shrine by midday. All were positive, visitors and service *mawakib*. Most participants had expressed their best positive attitude all along the last few days in the way they treated others, something they were not familiar with in their daily lives. They showed massive readiness to help each other. Everyone shared food and drinks with one another. The previous night, a visitor came late to the *Husseiniya* and did not find a place or bed to sleep. A group of people called him in and gave him a space and one offered him a blanket. Today after hours of walking, a walker called me to offer a dessert that, he said, would help me walk until lunch time. The journey had contributed to a change in the participants' traits and behaviors. No one pushed you for anything. There were no signs of the animosity or fear which could be seen in the beginning of the journey.

The visitation rituals, as Turner explains, helped visitors create an "existential communitas". Visitation is the total direct confrontation of Shi'a local identities that create in visitors a sense of being all the same and harmonious, and subject to no structural authority. *Al-Arb'ain* visitation reflects comprehensive collective spirit for various social groups and local belonging. Social status is the same for everyone. Everyone is *Zayer* (for man) or *Zayerah* (for woman) and similar to

anyone around them. There is no reason for differences or competition between them. The ritual provided an opportunity for participants to free themselves from daily materialistic preoccupations and to focus their attention is now focused on gaining an opportunity of revelation, to concentrate on the sacred symbols that could satisfy all of them equally.

The wish to reach Karbala and to see the dome of Al-Hussein's shrine was the only thing walkers wanted at that moment. The more they walked the faster and the more active they became, and the more they got rid of the signs of usual tiredness they felt during the previous days. One sign read that we were only 6,000 meters to Al-Hussein's shrine, but we walked for hours because of crowdedness and exhaustion. Then we saw another sign that read 3,000 meters. Distance used to be in km in the previous days, now it was in meters. Feelings were a mixture of happiness and sadness. Some wept, others bashed their chests enthusiastically while chanting:

Hussein, Abdullah's father

Your love runs in our blood

We came to you, *mawlana* [our leader].

Your visitors, receive us

On judgment day, do not forget us

Your visitors and you know us

Fear would not affect us

We do not go back, oh our guardian

Even if they cut our feet

To your grave, we crawl

Hussein, Abdullah's father.

These participants summed up the feelings of millions of visitors who came to visit Al-Hussein on the occasion of *Al-Arb'ain*. They came because of the spiritual relationship with Al-Hussein, a one mixed with love and sorrow for losing him, and provided them with strength and the capability to defy fear and hardships they faced. Nothing stopped them from reaching their destination. In return, they asked Al-Hussein to be generous with them and be their intercessor and to remember them in life and on the judgment day. These walkers had confirmed their presence in a Husseinite space that engulfed their spiritual and material surroundings, and sent many strong symbolic messages that documented their presence and participation in the commemoration of Imam Al-Hussein.

It was midday when all loudspeakers stopped broadcasting poems and *latmya*, and unanimously broadcasted a talk about prayers and their importance. Preaching of prayers and *Athan* were coming from the Karbala broadcast attached to Al-Hussein's shrine. They emphasized reviving rituals of prayers and stressed praying on time close to Al-Hussein's shrine and along walking route, where many big signs were hung and stressed the importance of prayers and practicing them.

Amid the road, there was a person in black clothes stained with clay who carried a tin filled with clay. He put some of it on any one who passed by. This clay is called Hussein's clay (*Torbat Al-Hussein*) and was taken from the place where he was killed in Karbala (see photograph 10).

Photograph 10: A man putting *Torbat Al- Hussein* on the walkers.

Many visitors were standing next to this person while he put clay on their faces, heads, and clothes. Walkers and visitors believed that Al-Hussein's clay is a medicine, cure, and blessing. The more we moved on, the more people were stained with clay.

On both sides of the road, dry clay shapes from Al-Hussein's clay are sold. They are geometric like circle, rectangle, and multisided. Most Iraqi Shi'a use these clay pieces to genuflect on them in their daily prayers. Al-Hussein's clay bears sacred traits because it comes from a sacred place of Al-Hussein's martyrdom. Al-Hussein's clay, either worn on clothes or the face, or in dry pieces used in prayers, is a means of symbolic communication between Shi'a and their

main sacred symbols which they think have the ability to bring positive change to their present and future.

We were close to Al-Hussein's shrine and were able to see the crowds of visitors at check points which meant that walking the short distance left is difficult. We walked a short distance then we saw a person standing next to a wheel chair and talking through a loudspeaker asking people if someone wanted a free lift to the check point. His name was Mohammed's father and he did not have children, though he got married seven years ago. He helped Al-Hussein's visitors to gain Al-Hussein's blessing and help to have children. He was doing that for more than ten days from early morning until late at night.

The check- point designated one passage for women and another for men. Visitors were divided into groups; each numbering about a hundred, who were are quickly searched by guards. And until the next group's turn, they chanted to glorify Al-Hussein and his family, and then they repeated slogans against *Wahhabis* and enemies of Shi'a. The *Wahhabis* killed the visitors, destroyed the city, and burned Imam Al-Hussein's shrine twice, once in 1802 and the other time in 1807, while looting it of its treasures.[287] The number of visitors at the check point increased. People needed to take side roads to reach the shrine. On both sides of the road, a group of young men were distributing cards; one side reads "Visitation of *Al-Arb'ain*" and on the other "*Ziyarat Warith*" another kind of

[287] Ibrahim Al-Haydari, *Trajidiya Karbala: Susyulujiya Al-Khitab Al-Shi'i,* (London: Dar Al Saqi, 1999) 61.

visitation prayer, and underneath both it read, "Dr. Ibrahim Al-Jaafery's present…We ask for your invocation."[288]

After a few minutes, all were standing in front of the golden dome of Al-Hussein's shrine. Everyone who saw the dome stopped afar with respect and reverence raising hands up and repeating the greeting "peace be upon you, Al-Hussein" (*Assalamu Alaika ya Aba Abdullah Al-Hussein*) as if they were really standing and talking in front of Al-Hussein. Seeing the dome is the first point of contact with the sacred symbol, and it carries a mixture of feelings of happiness, enthusiasm, awe, and sadness among visitors. It also prepares them for the stage of separation from their current condition to another stage before reaching Al-Hussein's shrine. The threshold is the outer gate of the shrine which is the pivotal change point where visitors will be transformed and experience a state of revelation and mysterious spirituality, intermingled with excitation, because of the desire for approaching Al-Hussein's shrine. These are huge feelings and wishes; purification from sins and gaining forgiveness with the help of Al-Hussein, in addition to wishes of having physical strength, livelihood, blessing, and cure from illness and damage.

The roads around Al-Hussein's shrine were full of mourning *mawakib* of *zanjeel* coming from various places in Iraq. They were parading in front of a stage at *Bab Al Qiblah* of Al-Hussein's shrine. These *mawakib* start their rituals according to a designated schedule and the visitors wait for the whole procession

[288] Ibrahim Al-Jaafery was the first prime minister elected after the fall of the Iraqi regime of Saddam Hussein and was elected in 2005, who served as the head of the Iraqi Islamic Daawa Party. Later, he separated from the Daawa party, and formed a new movement called *Tayar Al-Islah.*

to pass to the other side then they continue walking toward the shrine. On both sides of the road, people waited for parading *mawakib* while some of them hit their chests according to the rhythm of the drums. On what remained of the road to the shrine, a big number of children and men were selling green strips of cloth to visitors to carry to Al-Hussein's shrine to wipe against the shrine and to gain sacred power from Al-Hussein. At the gate of the shrine, a number of visitors stood headed by a religious man, carrying a book, who was reading the Visitation of *Al-Arb'ain* for them. As soon as he finished, a visitor gave him some money as a reward for what he did, then they entered Al-Hussein's shrine.

C. Rituals of *Al-Arb'ain* Visitation in Karbala

Rituals start in Karbala five days before *Al-Arb'ain* visitation and are usually marked by a parade of various mourning processions *Mawakib Al-'Aza.* The first mourning *mawkib* is the *Mawkib* of Caravan (*Mawakib Al-Dh'an*). It is a kind of passion play *tashabih* detecting the return of Al-Hussein's family from their journey in captivity from Damascus to Karbala on the 40th day to Al-Hussein's martyrdom. It is comprised of two main groups; the first is the group of the caravan guards wearing red and yellow gear and carrying spears and swords and riding horses. The second is a group of children of Al-Hussein's family in green gear, surrounded by guards; they appear before a line of camels carrying women of Al-Hussein's family inside special boxes (*Houdaj*)[289] used usually to transport women in the desert. In front of the women's caravan stood a man on camel in white clothes striped with green, face coved; it is Imam Ali bin Al-Hussein who

[289] *Houdaj* is buggy-like, made from wood and covered by colored cloth, placed on the camel to transport women and kids in the desert, to protect them from the sun and dust, as well as to cover them from the gazing of strangers.

led his family in their return procession from captivity to their homes. A reciter joins this procession for reading elegies. The sad elegies recited by the *radood* and the appearance of the caravan are meant to represent the historic event and materialize it for the spectators to transfer them to the real historic moment of the return of the captives to Karbala. The entry of the caravan marks the beginning of the rituals of *Al-Arb'ain.*

Caravan processions, parading outside Karbala, carry a big head covered with blood, and put in a glass cage which symbolizes the return of Al-Hussein's head with captives to be buried in Karbala. Men and women stood next to the glass cage trying to caress it then swipe their faces with their hands. Women, in the meanwhile, keep walking behind Al-Hussein's head, lamenting and weeping over it. The Department of Husseinite *Mawakib* and Committees in Iraq and Islamic World prevent caravan processions parading in Karbala with heads or corpses in *tashabih* because they believe it damages sacred figures and is an unsuitable practice. Caravan processions and *tashabih* are allowed to parade in Karbala only on *Safar* 16th-January 10th, 2012.

Mourning *mawakib* of *zangeel* and *latm,* coming from all over Iraq, parade for four days until the visitation day on *Safar* 20th-January 14th , 2012. Mourning *mawakib* of *zanjeel* practiced back chain-lashing on *Safar* 17th and 18th from 7:00 AM to midnight according to the schedule approved by the Department of Rituals.

Processions of head lacerating *(Mawakib Al- Tatbir)* do not practice their rituals in the Visitation of *Al-Arb'ain* in Karbala. That is because these rituals are

only practiced on *Muharram* 10th (day of blood) due to this day's sacred nature, in addition to the fact that avoiding *tatbir* in *Al-Arb'ain* is a Husseinite tradition.

Processions of chest beating (*Mawakib Al-Latm)* are practiced on *Safar* 19th and 20th, which is the last ritual practiced before the visitation. The rituals practiced by *mawakib* of *zanjeel* and *latm* during the Visitation of *Al-Arb'ain* are not different from the ones they practiced during *'Ashurā* day. The only exception could be the number of participants, which is bigger in *Al-Arb'ain* because of the wider participation from all over Iraq.

The ceremonies of visitation rituals started after midday of *Al-Arb'ain* on January 14th, 2012 when visitors approached Al-Hussein's shrine in groups. They then stopped to practice *latm* and recite elegies before entering. Next, they raised their hands to greet Al-Hussein's grave. Visitors enter inside the shrine and orbit it while praying and reciting invocations special for *Ziyarat Al-Arb'ain*. Same as *'Ashurā* , books of Shi'a literature give a specific description of rules of visitations, like ways of ablution, body refinement, spiritual preparedness, walking to the shrine, treating others, and how to pray and recite invocations and codes of conduct close to Al-Hussein's shrine.

The long distance the visitors walked and lived an experience of liberation from daily materialistic life led them to a state of spiritual liberation and reaching out to their inner selves more than any time previously. Everyone, close to Al-Hussein's shrine, feels more prepared to fuse with the sacred environment that controls everything around them. The visitors, at this moment, after the exhaustion of the long journey and the abandonment of usual daily life, feel

purified from their sins, and are able to enter the space of sacredness and gain the reward of reaching Imam Al-Hussein's shrine.

These rituals are not only about spirituality, but they are also economic enterprises. Most participants, at the end of these rituals, make sure they buy presents and gifts for their families and relatives, especially those that express the individuality of the occasion of *Al-Arb'ain* and Karbala, as a way of remembering the occasion. Markets in Karbala, especially those close to Al-Hussein's and Al-Abbas' shrines face high numbers of shoppers annually. This also applies to hotels which are filled with people all around the year. Home owners, close to the two shrines, rent their places for high prices during visitation time to families coming from overseas. For them, this is the season to get additional revenue. Due to having millions of visitors for two weeks of visitation, trading season in Karbala reaches its peak. Karbala trade is the prime beneficiary from the season although the city witnesses a large number of vendors from outside who come to provide various services for visitors for very cheap prices.[290]

D. Conclusion

There are many rituals practiced in the visitation of *Al-Arb'ain*, in or outside Karbala, or close to Al-Hussein or Al-Abbas' shrines. The most important rituals outside Karbala are walking, offering services to visitors, and *tashabih*. Inside Karbala, there are rituals of *Ziyarat Al-Arb'ain*to Al-Hussein's shrine by participants, processions of passion plays called *mawakib* of *Al-Dh'an, mawakib*

[290] I met with some people who came from the Samawa and other cities, during the *Al-Arb'ain* visit and were settled in Karbala, who transported weary participants in a wooden cart (as I did) for almost a kilometer and the rate is 5 thousands dinars, or about 4 dollars.

of zanjeel in addition to service *mawakib* and bodies that offer food, drinks, and bedding.

Visitation of *Al-Arb'ain* is the occasion of total confrontation of Iraqi Shi'a groups, and the feeling that all geographic obstacles and social class differences would disappear. Visitation also reveals the strength of collective harmony and cohesion amongst Shi'a groups and their ability to mobilize and organize themselves in a very distinguished manner. The collective spirit dominant in visitation deepens the joint intellectual and social links and ties the participants. Consequently, it supports the possibility of building their own community. Additionally, the journey of walking done by visitors from their places to Karbala helps enrich their spiritual and material experiences and allows them to meet other people from other places which results in acquiring different experiences and thoughts. That helps improve participants' spiritual and social status. Visitation of *Al-Arb'ain* reflects roles of various Shi'a groups considering that the visitation is a huge chance to promote various thoughts and concepts. Religious groups make sure to promote their own ideas on this occasion to consolidate their own visions being considered as a best pattern that could help the group to succeed. Every group seeks to strengthen its own relationships and with other participants in the visitation of *Al-Arb'ain.*

Visitation of *Al-Arb'ain* reflects the powerful role of places and the religious institution. Karbala seems to be a place every person and group heads to because it has Al-Hussein's shrine, which all Iraqi Shi'a seek to maintain links with either spiritual or material. Al-Hussein's shrine becomes the first Shi'a goal to reach,

visit, gain its blessing, and renew the pledge to him, being considered one of their main sacred symbols. The role of the religious institution, represented by the Department of Husseinite *Mawakib* and Committees in Iraq and the Islamic World, appears very strong to participating groups and individuals because of the strength of control it practices which extends even outside Karbala.

Chapter 6

CONCLUSION

A. Overview of Mourning Rituals

This research discussed that mourning rituals, practiced by Iraqi Shi'a on the occasions of Al-Hussein's martyrdom in *'Ashurā* and *Al-Arb'ain*, have a distinctive influence on individuals' and groups' lives in many levels such as the religious, emotional, social, political and psychological. The impact of mourning rituals varies in its different practices and different levels, but ultimately all rituals have a clear impact on Iraqi Shi'a lives as a whole. This study found major correlation between religious and social levels, and political and psychological levels as well. This signifies the importance of these rituals in people's lives, and their major role in structuring the individual and group among Iraqi Shi'a. These notions and thoughts have led the author to argue that mourning rituals practiced by Iraqi Shi'a in *'Ashurā* and *Al-Arb'ain* contribute effectively to their lives and change their social status. The rituals also assist in showing Iraqi Shi'a as one group that has a common symbolic language, which distinguishes them from their surroundings, provides them with an opportunity to express and state their unity and solidarity, and manifest their collective strength in facing perils and challenges, hence leading to maintaining their social existence.

Mourning rituals practiced in '*Ashurā* and *Al-Arb'ain* have contributed distinctively to the formation and support of Shi'a Islam. The term Shi'a did not refer to any specific group of Muslims before Al-Hussein's martyrdom. The nature and principles of Shi'a Islam were not clearly shaped until Al-Hussein's

martyrdom in the Karbala battle of 680 C.E. These rituals performed by Al-Hussein's family and his advocates in early times have become a decisive matter in attracting the sympathy of the public about the gory tragedy inflicted upon Al-Hussein, the Prophet's grandson, and have become a sacred Islamic symbols. The *Tawaboon* (Penitents), one of the earliest Shi'a Muslim movements, made use of the sympathy of Muslims with Al-Hussein's cause after a few years from his martyrdom. They did so to gain support for their demands of social justice and protest against all forms of oppression, specifically their victimization by the Umayyad Caliphs. The *Tawaboon* movement became the sponsor of collective mourning rituals around Al-Hussein's grave and used that opportunity to mobilize its advocates and gain support. It waged war against the Umayyads to avenge Al-Hussein. Therefore, mourning rituals when practiced not only reflected the emotional aspect, but also the ideological thoughts and political tendency of the individuals and groups, that later became known explicitly as Shi'a.

Al-Hussein's martyrdom became a center in the beginnings of Shi'a thinking and founded many Shi'a principles and concepts in years to come. Shi'a mourning rituals have acquired many functions: some ideas contributing to organizing Shi'a ideology, and others are political used against Shi'a enemies. Historical events, after Al-Hussein's death, have proved that mourning rituals practiced on his martyrdom's commemoration were emotional rituals that have developed later to acquire political dimensions and purposes. Eventually, these rituals have developed new roles shaped by early conflicts to become a semi struggle between the "authority" of Caliphs and the "opposition" of the Shi'a.

Practicing mourning rituals has become an essential function in forming features of Shi'a in general and Iraqi Shi'a in specific because they were the first initiators of these thoughts.

Al-Hussein's shrine in Karbala has became known as a center for practicing mourning rituals in *'Ashurā* and *Al-Arb'ain*, then gradually developed into a city that has enjoyed spiritual, political, and economic power not only in Iraq but also for all Shi'a worldwide. Karbala has become a sacred Shi'a site that competes with other sacred Islamic sites. Shi'a from all over the world head to their central meeting site, and they show their various local cultural backgrounds when there. The rituals they perform at Al-Hussein's shrine contribute to bringing them together and provide them with a common feeling of belonging.

The mourning rituals performed by Iraqi Shi'a on *'Ashurā* and *Al-Arb'ain* for fourteen centuries have had a major share in establishing and rebuilding the Iraqi Shi'a society within the general Iraqi social structure. Although mourning rituals have been prohibited and restricted by various governments that ruled Iraq, their practice have never stopped. They have been practiced both publicly and secretly. Attempts to prohibit and restrict these rituals have sometimes back fired. The more restrictions and prohibitions imposed on '*Ashurā* and *Al-Arb'ain* rituals, the more resistant the participants become and the greater the numbers of those involved. Thus, practicing these rituals is one of the most important aspects of Iraqi Shi'a resistance and protest against their enemies.

The mourning rituals held every year in *'Ashurā* and *Al-Arba'in* have gradually become a prominent contribution to the rebuilding and formation of

main features of the Iraqi Shi'a community. Individual and group participation in the rituals have helped change their social status. Some mourning rituals like *Majlis Al-'Aza*, *ziyara*, and walking to visit shrines, became rituals of passage that assist participants in acquiring a new social status after completing these rituals and returning home. Names like *Zayer* or *Zayerah*, and Al-Hussein's servant (*Khadem* Al-Hussein) become titles that provide their bearers prominent social status amongst their peers and contribute to their success in work and other life aspects.

These rituals, as in *Al-Arba'in* for example, assist in manifesting the strength of the system of social solidarity amongst different Shi'a groups and individuals. Various practices in this ritual contribute in showing the collective spirit and these groups' power to mobilize and organize themselves and appear as one group able to face various challenges. The rituals also provide participants with a suitable opportunity to deepen their wide variety of thoughts and strengthen their social ties. Additionally, this occasion gives participants the chance to experience new places and people which results in them acquiring new skills and thoughts that help them develop socially in the future.

Participating in mourning rituals help improve the participants' psychological status. The unstable security situation in Iraq, especially after the fall of the Baath regime in 2003, has deprived most Iraqis of the chance to access entertainment and social spaces. Shi'a women in Iraq are forced to stay at home most of the time due to security dangers, lack of job opportunities, and social customs and traditions. This explains why their participation in *'Ashurā* and *Al-Arba'in*

provides them with an access to a social life and a chance to meet others and change everyday monotony. This helps improve most of the female participants' psychologically. And that might explain the phenomenon of the increasing numbers of women participating in the mourning rituals of walking. I have noticed this while walking with groups of walkers from Najaf to Karbala.

The mourning rituals stimulate the economic cycle and help provide seasonal jobs for many people. Organizing *'Ashurā* and *Al-Arba'in* requires huge amounts of meat and drinks for the participants, which creates strong supply and demand operations in the Iraqi markets during mourning rituals. The trade of flags, images, audio CDs, tools, and folklore costumes designed for these two events creates job opportunities for many people, and gives jobs to the unemployed. These rituals represent the annual pinnacle of earning potential for a few people like reciters and *radoods* because they are in high demand to perform in many mourning *majalis.*

Many individuals and groups use *'Ashurā* and *Al-Arba'in* to promote their ideological and political thoughts. They appear as the "normative communitas" of Turner, and also strive for social dominance over some organizations. These groups are active in spreading their thoughts by either distribution of books and pamphlets to promote their writers, or displaying and hanging images and posters that bear their thinkers' thoughts. Some political groups participate in offering their services to the participants in the rituals in an attempt to gain their satisfaction and support. Additionally, political parties organize and finance their own processions of Al-Hussein to use the environment of mourning rituals

because it attracts such a wide participation of the various stratums of the Iraqi Shi'a community. Tribes, in their turn, organize their processions to carry their names, participate in the rituals and consolidate their social role.

Poetry is considered an effective method used in *'Ashurā* and *Al-Arba'in* rituals because of its direct impact on the participants. Using Arabic poetry of high eloquence whose words and meanings come from the depth of history is an attempt from the reciter to pull the audience from its present time to the original past time of the Arabic language which is relevant to the Karbala battle. The reciter would later read popular poetry in the Iraqi dialect understood and used by participants in their daily lives to connect their past with their present. This process achieves solid connection between poetic address and participants and eventually brings about an emotional impact on the audience which results in more interaction with the rituals.

Husseinite poems recited in *majalis* represent an important way of protesting against the various political regimes that governed Iraq. They are one of the most important methods the Shi'a media used against their enemies in order to participate in achieving political change. These poems express feelings of resistance and protest against previous regimes and use the massive turnout in *'Ashurā* and *Al-Arba'in* as an audience. They are usually well received by listeners because they express oppression to tyranny, to which the participant think they have been subjected during previous reigns. Some Husseinite poems still play their role in popular protesting and reject wrong current policies by

directing strict criticisms to the current government because of its failure in providing such essential services such as electricity, housing, and jobs.

During the performance of *'Ashurā* and *Al-Arba'in* rituals, the true strength of some religious institutions that practice a noticeable role on participants becomes clearer. For example, the Department of Husseinite *Mawakib* and Committees in Iraq and the Islamic World's headquarters is in Karbala and controls the direction of all Husseinite *mawakib*. This organization has the wide authority to issue instructions special for the rituals of *'Ashurā* and *Al-Arba'in*, and organizes the entry and departure of *mawakib* and their processions in Karbala. It also has the authority to withdraw licenses and identity cards it grants to *mawakib* whenever it finds breaches to its regulations. Police forces usually support and help this department to see through its regulations.

B. Repetition of Rituals

The rituals organized on the occasions of *'Ashurā* and *Al-Arba'in* have become renewed in the life of Iraqi Shi'a. These rituals provide their participants with various types of necessary changes to defy challenges they face in everyday life. These rituals have become, by repetition over centuries, a part of their daily life. More than that, they have gradually become a comprehensive life pattern that is reflected in their conduct and reactions toward some issues, and is present in their poetry, literature, and proverbs. These rituals have started at one point close to Al-Hussein's blood, and gradually have created numerous ripples of rebuilding and consolidation of new concepts for the Iraqi Shi'a participants.

Rituals in general, are a practice that requires separation from usual reality to achieve its goals, and need their own special means of expressions and symbolic language. The reason behind this is to absorb the phase of separation and express the environment of the rituals, which reality and its usual language are unable to express. This explains why we find in *'Ashurā* and *Al-Arba'in* various signs and symbols that attempt to reveal the content of the ritual. Body motions in *latm*, *zanjeel, tatbir* and *tashabih* are employed as symbolic language for the rituals. Flags, *hosa* and the *Tweareej* Run are active symbols in these rituals that reflect the participants' cultural and social background.

If a ritual was in general a practice that represents another incident, then its repetition is aimed at organizing main activities of this ritual and maintaining the unity of its participants and keeping them within one social establishment. Participants, by repeating rituals and practices, adopt them and eventually they grow stronger forming trust in them. Repetition is an essential element noticeable in practicing rituals.

Ibn Khaldoun (1332-1406 C.E.), a Muslim sociologist, gave important theories in sociology in which he analyzed the states of people, their traits, and elements affecting them and distinguishing them from others. In his book, *Al-Muqaddima* 'The Introduction" (1377 C.E.), Ibn Khaldoun presented a crucial remark on the importance of repeating a practice. He demonstrates that a participant would, by repetition of practice, acquire a new trait which is a kind of skill or faculty (*malaka*) that occurs only by repetition. Repetition of a practice renders it into a trait, and then this one gets repeated to become a status which is a

trait fixed in itself. This trait by repetition becomes a *malaka* which is the fixed trait. [291]

This faculty *malaka* becomes part of the participant's nature, and it remains with him just like any other skill they learn by practicing and repetition. Ibn Khaldoun gives many examples to the importance of practicing repetition such as the case of learning a language where repetition becomes one of the most important means of learning a language. Eventually, language becomes with time, a basic fixed trait to the participants. The value of his opinion is based first on the fact that he presents an advanced point of view for understanding outcomes resulting from repeating a practice in general, and second, he assists us in knowing the influence of repeating a practice and making sure to practice it regularly in rituals. His opinion applies directly to *'Ashurā* and *Al-Arba'in* rituals. Annual commemoration of *'Ashurā* and *Al-Arba'in* contributes to the crystallizing of these rituals deep into the emotions of Iraqi Shi'a. Thus, Iraqi Shi'a rituals become part of the character of individuals and society.

While repetition leads to faculty for Ibn Khaldoun, the repetition of a practice for Pierre Bourdieu leads to the habitos. Bourdieu builds an argument to claim that habitos is "a system of lasting, transposable dispositions which, integrating past experiences, functions at every moment as matrix of perceptions, and actions and makes possible the achievement of infinitely diversified tasks."[292] According to Bourdieu's definition of habitos, it is also a concept resulting from a relation between practice and the social actor's structure that aims at reproducing the

[291] Abdulrahman Ibn Khaldoun, *Al-Muqaddima,* Vol. 3, (Morocco: Aldar Albeydha, 2005) 250.
[292] Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, (New York: Cambridge UP, 1977) 82-83.

reorganization of the physical and spiritual society, which gives a practice the ability to bring about change in the normal system. Bourdieu's idea is of high value for studying and realizing the role habitos could play in the participants' lives, for being able to bring about obvious change by the power inherited in practicing. Hence, repeating practices is an attempt to change the reality and social status of the participants.

According to that, repetition of the practices, either to create faculty *malaka* or habitos, in *'Ashurā* and *Al-Arba'in* seeks to bring about change to the social status of participants, and reproduce their new reality by repeating these practices periodically. Therefore, *'Ashurā* and *Al-Arba'in* rituals contribute to rebuilding a new relationship between participants and their social structure. Additionally, these rituals are an attempt to achieve some definite results like forgiveness, satisfaction, or a feeling of serenity as a result of participating in rituals which the participants think will bring them closer to achieving their wishes for being closer to their main religious symbols.

Participants in *'Ashurā* and *Al-Arba'in* rituals show feelings of regret and dereliction toward Al-Hussein, for failing to assist him in the Karbala battle. These feelings could be seen in some mourning rituals like in *tatbir*, *zanjeel* and *latmiya*. Though the battle occurred in 680 C.E., the feeling of regret is still present in some participants. They feel so not because they have made a mistake against Al-Hussein nor failing to participate in a battle that occurred before they were even born. It is because they are immensely attached to Al-Hussein as one of their main ideological symbols. One could add to that their deep wish to

participate in supporting Al-Hussein even if only symbolically through transition from their present to the past time, which happens to participants in rituals.

Tatbir rituals, for example, are the most dangerous ones practiced in *'Ashurā*. These rituals express the participants' wish to show their love, loyalty, by renewing vows to Al-Hussein through bleeding during the *tatbir* process. Participants in these rituals consider themselves true fighters in an army prepared to stand for and defend Hussein and change the course of history, if they were given the chance to return to the past time. *Tatbir* is a kind of participation in a hypothetical war beyond the usual norms of time and place. But the blood bled by participants is the ultimate sign of credibility for participating in that battle.

C. Future Research

Since the establishment of the modern Iraqi state in 1921 until 2003, Iraqi Shi'a have not achieved the minimum of their goals, either a Shi'a state, as in Iran, or living in a modern civil state that respects them as equal citizens with others and provides them with equal opportunity. Iraqi Shi'a have been on the peripheries of state structure and its various establishments, and have not been treated as equal citizens by the successive governments of Iraq. Sometimes, official media described them as foreigners after the 1991 upheaval.[293] The Shi'a in Iraq have suffered from the failure of building a modern state where they could live equally with others. Also the failure to build a Shi'a state like Iran in 1978, which have resulted in the feeling of frustration and sadness reflected in most Iraqi Shi'a.

[293] Eric Davis, *Memories of State: Politics, History, and Collective Identity in Modern Iraq*, (London: University of California Press, 2005) 227.
242.

The pains and sorrows caused by the wars and malpractices of Baath Party in Iraq (1968-2003) have helped spread religious phenomenon in general and the practice of mourning rituals specifically. Loss, destitution, failure of 1991 popular upheaval, and fall of nationalistic concepts have assisted in the rise of strong popular religious movements, especially during the 1990s. The governor, in its turn, strengthened this trend by the so-called *Al-Hamalah Al-Eimaniyyah* (faith campaigns) after the failure of pan Arabic approach. It had shut down pubs and built numerous mosques.[294] Wars, economic sanction, and failure have led people to look for alternatives to compensate for all their losses. Consequently, religion has been a suitable haven when their reality failed to yield any solutions. Feelings of extreme fear of the catastrophic reality and the lack of any way out have led the people in Iraq to adopt a religious course even stronger than before. This could be seen especially in regard to the ritualistic symbolic side of religion which is a reaction to seek salvation from painful reality replaced by serenity which religion provides. The number of mosques goers have increased and the visitors of the sacred shrine in Iraq as well especially during the *'Ashurā* time and the 40th day visit *Al-Arba'in*. In 1999, more than two million Iraqis, headed to Karbala (10%-12% of whole Iraqi population and 20% of Shi'a) to commemorate Al-Hussein's martyrdom. In 2001, the number rose up to 4.2 million.[295] The increase has kept on. In 2003, the rate of visitors to sacred shrines jumped higher than earlier.

[294] Jabar 272.
[295] Jabar 272.

The increase of participants' numbers in the mourning rituals in Iraq in the *'Ashurā* and *Al-Arb'ain* rituals is due to many reasons. This wide participation started after the fall of the regime in 2003. It does not trace back to the reasons of ideology, sociology, politics, or economy only. There is another important reason that I have come to know of through my work on this research. This is connected to the state of affairs of Iraqi Shi'a specifically, and what Iraq has suffered in general because of wars waged from the mid 1970s up to now.

The first war out of six is the one the Iraqi government waged against Iraqi Kurds in the north, between 1974-1975. Casualties were more than 10,000 murdered or wounded.[296] That led to a high influx of corpses of Shi'a soldiers for burial in Najaf, which in turn resulted in growing feelings of popular Shi'a resentment of this war, especially when most casualties were Shi'a who were the majority of the Iraqi army. These high Shi'a casualties made Shi'a clergymen oppose the war and declared their refusal to it in the *'Ashurā* commemoration in 1975. That triggered a violent response from the Iraqi government. It arrested and executed Shi'a leaders to control the country and end Shi'a wide states of resentment.[297]

The second war was the Iraq-Iran war (first Gulf war) from 1980-1988. It was the longest one and World War II was the only war that exceeded it in terms of casualties for the 20th century. It caused more than 1,250, 000 casualties killed or wounded in addition to Iraqi economic losses of $452.6 billion and 100 billion of

[296] Marion Farouk Sluglett and Peter Sluglett, *Iraq Since 1958: From Revolution to Dictatorship*, (New York: I. B. Tauris, 2001) 169.
[297] Faleh A. Jabar, *The Shiite Movement in Iraq*, (London: Saqi Books, 2003) 208; Charles Tripp, *A History of Iraq*, (New York: Cambridge UP, 2007) 204.

debt mainly to Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and the then Soviet Union.[298] This eight year war led to the repetition of the practices of mourning rituals on a daily basis in most Iraqi homes; where it was rare not to hear in any Iraqi quarter, especially the Shi'a ones, of family deaths and to receive corpses or injured soldiers, or hear news of someone missing in action or of prisoners of war. With every dead soldier, there was a family mourning for those beloved lost ones. Some mothers have remained in ceaseless mourning because they have not seen the corpses of their sons and they would not believe they were dead therefore they stuck to the hope that they might return one day and knock on their doors again.

On August 20, 1990, Iraqi troops invaded Kuwait and declared it as part of Iraq and as the 19th Iraqi governorate. After a few months, Iraq faced an international alliance led by the US that attacked and defeated Iraqi troops and eventually expelled them out of Kuwait in 1991. Though this war did not last for years, it was of heavy consequences on Iraqis. During the few weeks of air raids of allied forces, bombardment destroyed roads, electricity, water, drainage, warehouses of food, factories and most of the infrastructure. That set Iraq back for decades especially in terms of industrial production and economic structure.[299]

Due to the collapse of the social, economic and political infrastructure as a result of the second Gulf war, a few regiments announced a rebellion in the south of Iraq on February 28, 1991 and fourteen governorates out of eighteen participated in an upheaval that was the strongest during the Baathist reign in order to topple the regime. The attempt was not successful, and was crushed

[298] Sluglett 271.
[299] Eric Davis, *Memories of State: Politics, History, and Collective Identity in Modern Iraq*, (London: University of California Press, 2005) 227.

violently by Saddam's regime. The regime's cruelty was expressed by writing on its tanks which read: "No more Shi'a after today" (*La Shi'a baad Al-Yawm).* More than 100,000 Iraqi were either killed or wounded.[300] It also made more than 50,000 Iraqis cross the borders to Saudi Arabia as refugees, while thousands more went to refugee camps in Iran. Others chose to flee or hide from the regime in the marshes to escape the government.[301] Big numbers of Iraqi youth were arrested and were never seen afterwards. Thousands died in the regime's jails due to a campaign led by Uday, Saddam's son, in 1997.[302]

This tragic drama has not finished yet. It was aggravated by the sanctions and compensation resolution imposed by the United Nations on Iraq. These measures did not affect the regime as much as they impacted the civilians, especially the poor classes. Another suffering called the International Sanction came in, under which Iraqis lived until the fall of Saddam's regime in 2003. The sanctions, which Iraqis named the blockade (*Al-Hisar*), lasted 13 years, started from the Kuwait war till 2003. They caused a lot more damage to the Iraqi society than to the structure of the state. Iraq was known to have had one of these most advanced health care systems previously; during the blockade it became a field for diseases like chicken pox and cholera that had disappeared a long time ago then. The average of children deaths and the sick was very high because of the embargo on medicines.[303]

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[300] Davis 228, 231.
[301] Tripp 247.
[302] Davis 231.
[303] Davis 232.

On April 9, 2003, American troops entered Baghdad, and it was declared the day of the fall of Saddam's regime which had ruled Iraq from 1968 until 2003. Shi'a processions in millions set out on foot to visit the sacred shrines of Al-Hussein in *Al-Arb'ain* a few days after the fall. This triggered a state of sectarian tension. Terrorists, political parties with conflicting interests and the shelling of sacred sites resulted in deepening the Shi'a-Sunni division and confrontations between the two sides escalated to a semi civil war in the years of 2005-2006. Yet again, death started to devour people and it appeared in yet another war, but this time it was about abduction, assassination, and bombing. Once more, the number of corpses increased with many never returning home. Mourning rituals and lamentation have been ceaseless.

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